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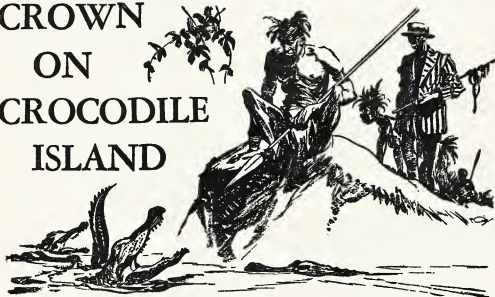
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The CROWN ON CROCODILE ISLAND

By ROBERT SIMPSON



DANFORTH sat down on a tarpaulin-covered carrier's pack on the bush path to Saganna, tipped his sun helmet on the back of his head and mopped his face and neck with a handkerchief that was already damp. Then, for the fourth time in half as many hours, he damned all creation.

But creation, as represented by his string of native carriers and his immediate West African surroundings, remained unmoved.

In the swamps of the Lower Niger, and particularly in that part of it adjacent to the famous and infamous crocodile pool at Saganna, profanity is likely to be as free as it is inadequate; and the profligate jungle, too busily engaged in squandering its wealth of life as riotously as it creates it, pays just as little heed to the cusswords of a graduate civil engineer as it does to the screaming chatter of a monkey.

Danforth was a civil engineer.

Among other things not so respectable, he was also an inveterate gambler and liar; but it was because he was an

engineer that he was in the employ of the Nigerian government, and his objective at the moment was the district headquarters at Saganna.

There he expected to encounter a director of public works who, unless a miracle happened, would have some pointed and conclusive remarks to make to him. Or it might actually be the district commissioner himself who would do the talking. Or even a commissioner of police. Or all three of them together.

In any event, Danforth was reasonably sure that when district headquarters at Saganna learned why the road he had been ordered to build between Otobi and Saganna had no immediate prospect of being begun, his sojourn in the Nigerian government service would come to an abrupt end. He would be lucky if he were given the opportunity to resign and catch the first mail boat out of Forcados.

There were, however, still a goodly number of broiling, equatorial miles between him and Saganna; and aside from the fact that his feet burned and

hummed with every stabbing step he took, and that prickly heat made his shoulders and back cringe from the shifting touch of his shirt, he saw no virtue in hastening matters.

Danforth could have told his idling, scraggly and dirty looking carriers that he remembered an occasion when a single minute had cost him a million. He could have told them also that he recalled a painful episode in his early twenties when a mile had cost him a miss—perhaps a Mrs.

He would have been trifling very carelessly with the truth in both instances, but this inconsequent fact would not have bothered him in the least. For Danforth loved a good, intriguing, dramatic lie that was euphoniously expressed, almost as much as he loved to bet on a rank outsider and win.

This fervor for outsiders was a sufficient reason why he was always poor. It was an equally sufficient reason why he was frequently in trouble, because his gambling impulses did not confine themselves to the racetrack, the card table and the luck of the wheel. The normal flirtations with chance had, for Danforth, almost become passé. His money liked the new and unusual hazard; and when he had gambled with Chief Skin of Otobi . . .

Danforth winced and tried to believe it was because his feet hurt and his eyes smarted.

He did not want to think of the wily Chief Skin of Otobi, any more than he wanted to think of the Otobi road; a road that he was afraid habit would induce him to refer to in future as the road that had led to ruin. He knew he would do this because the expression was too trite to be avoided; and this time—Danforth smiled a dull and dusty smile—it would be true!

For, this time, Danforth had gambled, not simply with money, but with his job and his reputation as an engineer, which latter was the one thing he prized above and beyond all other things.

He called to his houseboy, who stood off at a respectful distance, and ordered him to bring a drink.

"Yessah," the boy said. "Be whisk' soda, sah?"

"No. Just water." Then, strictly

for his own benefit, Danforth mumbled sourly, "There's no luck in liquor. And if I'm going to try to talk Kingdon into—oh, hell! What's the use? Go straight to headquarters and take your medicine, then catch Saturday's boat out of this lousy country for good. Eh? What's that? Water?" He took the glass absently from his houseboy and drank.

In spite of what he had just said about going direct to headquarters and getting it over with, Danforth was thinking, as he had been doing for several days and an equal number of sleepless nights, that if he could reach Kingdon, who was the agent-general for the African Merchants Company, there might be no need of going to district headquarters at all.



KINGDON was no size physically, but he was a mighty power in the palm oil trade; a Napoleon in his field; a quiet eyed, purposeful little man who had an enviable reputation for unflinching courage and for an uncanny ability to work miracles among the seething hodge-podge of tribes on the Lower Niger. His political significance was recognized without quibble or question from Lagos to Old Calabar.

And Kingdon was a friend of Danforth's. At least, Danforth hoped he was. He had known Kingdon ever since the little man had been a trader's assistant at Bakana and he had thrown public works department business in the way of Kingdon's trading company for years; had drunk his liquor; given him tips on long shots that had actually won; and once upon a time had helped Kingdon fish a sick white assistant and two Kroo-houseboys out of a burning bungalow in the Siluko district.

Kingdon, of course, was a big gun now. It was quite some time since Danforth and he had hobnobbed together, and perhaps Kingdon had forgotten the Siluko incident and the memorable tip on Holy Roller that had won at eighty-five to one. However, Danforth hoped that Kingdon, without having his memory refreshed, could be induced to bring pressure to bear upon Chief Skin of Otobi that would make the chief come to some kind of terms. If he, Danforth,

could find Kingdon and . . .

"Find him!" he muttered disgustedly into the dust. "Where will you find him? He may be at Saganna, but there's no good reason why he should be there just because you happen to want him to be, and the way your rotten luck's been running lately, he's probably up in the Kukuruku country or down at Opobo. Simply because he was around here less than a month ago—oh, don't be a bigger damn fool than you can help! Kingdon's a hundred-to-one shot. Even if you had any money you wouldn't lay a bicuba on the chance of finding him now."

A bicuba was worth six cents and, as he grumbled to himself, Danforth put his hand in his trousers pocket and glumly brought forth a large silver piece that, like the American silver dollar, was not by any means a popular coin.

It was an English crown, worth five shillings, and Danforth had carried it for a long time as a kind of consolation, and also because it was just a hundred years older than he was. On occasions of this sort, when his luck had been unusually bad, it pleased Danforth to murmur:

"Well, I haven't abdicated yet. I still have my crown."

Then he would always laugh and try to believe that this was very funny. But not this time. He turned the coin over and over in his hand, stared at the glinting silver whiteness of it till the sun's sharply deflected light stung his eyes.

"Hunh. Let's see if Kingdon's at Saganna. Heads he is. Tails he's—"

He spun the coin and caught it and laid it on the back of his left hand, drawing the fingers of his right hand away very slowly. His mouth tightened sharply. His eyes closed. He sat for perhaps half a minute quite still, the crown resting on the back of his hand tails up.

The subdued chatter of his idling carriers, the raucous, screeching voices of the jungle, the whining, buzzing flight of multicolored insects and birds—Danforth did not hear any of this. His aching feet and smarting eyes and empty pockets—these things, too, were forgotten in that half minute of silence; a si-

lence that only Danforth knew, a silence that savored of death.

In that stillness behind Danforth's closed eyes, with a broiling, baking sun sending stabbing shafts of light through the thick foliage overhead, Danforth shivered.

Gambling was a fever, and grabbing the limelight with a lie was a passion of sorts, but the things that were really Danforth were the roads that marched through the jungle and flung wide its gates before the feet of men.

The proposed road from Otobi to Saganna for instance. The road he would never finish.

Danforth opened his eyes, reached absently for the crown on the back of his left hand and returned it to his trousers pocket. His glance strayed backward along the narrow bush path toward Otobi, and he saw a native woman, with a baby humped on her back like a Scotch fishwife's creel, and with a calabash on her head, come trudging in his direction. Straggling behind this woman were two spindle-legged native youngsters, and still farther along the path a native in a loincloth was running, apparently with the intention of catching up with the woman.

Unconsciously Danforth's hand clenched on his knees; clenched and unclenched, beating a light, nervous tattoo. His head came around very slowly and he looked in the general direction of Saganna. He rose.

"All right," he grunted to his houseboy who was nearest. "We go. One time."

"Yessah."

At once the voice of the headman crackled on the heavy, sultry air; the carriers picked up their loads, dragged themselves into line again, and once more the wabbly, snaky black string moved on.

Danforth followed, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the naked heels of the houseboy immediately ahead.

"Saturday's boat," he muttered after awhile, and licked his dry lips, "should be the *Gonda*. Hunh. Rolls and pitches like a ruddy barrel. But what's the difference if you're drunk anyway?"

Danforth laughed. Drunk? He hadn't been on a real drunk since—not

since Wild Rose won the Piper Handicap. Seventy to one. And it came through just the night before his leave began! He'd never forget waking up in the Seville Hotel in Las Palmas, nearly three weeks later, with old Major Galbraith of the Seaforths, astride the bed rail, singing in a cracked, whisky baritone—what was the tune?

Danforth tried to remember, but the sound of pattering feet behind him struck persistently upon his ears and finally made him turn his head.

The woman with the baby and the calabash, and the spindle-legged youngsters who had been at her heels, were nowhere in sight; possibly somewhere around the last turn. But the native in the loincloth who had been running was still running and coming straight toward Danforth, gesturing to him to stop.

Danforth stopped. He called out an order to his headman, and the carriers stopped too. Presently the runner came up to Danforth and held out a folded piece of paper commonly referred to as a chit.

"Be foh you, sah," the runner said, panting for breath, his whole body glistening with sweat.

Danforth, who vaguely recognized the boy, unfolded the chit and read:

Otobi
Monday morning

Sorry did not arrive in time to catch you. Better come back and let's talk it over before you go to headquarters. I'll wait for you here till tomorrow night. Segwanga is my next stop if this doesn't reach you in time and you think I can still help.

Chin, chin.

—KINGDON

Danforth stared at the chit—at the signature particularly—yet even as new life leaped through his whole body, his disgust with himself was altogether unqualified.

"A hundred-to-one shot!" he muttered. "Going away under wraps. And you wouldn't have laid a bicuba on it! You're a hell of a gambler!"



LATE that night, in a corrugated iron and pitch pine bungalow on the government beach on Otobi Creek, a stand lamp shed its moth-clouded light on the

faces of two white men, neither of whom, at the moment, was saying anything at all.

One of them was curled up in a canvas deckchair sipping a lime juice; the other was shifting restlessly in a creaking wicker rocker drinking a whisky and soda. And except for the far-scattered, flickering hurricane lanterns that moved lazily along mangrove stick breakwaters in the hands of trading beach watchboys, the light of the stand lamp in the bungalow was the only light visible on Otobi Creek.

Even the trade canoes that hugged the shadows of the mangroves on their way to the native markets, or to the white trading beaches, passed silently on through the darkness, giving no sign of their existence except when the light swish of paddle blades whispered across the black face of the water.

Of course, Otobi, from a strictly white point of view, was dead and deserted most of the time, day or night. The government establishment there was small, almost negligible; the trading beaches equally small and widely separated. But when the road to Saganna went through all this would change. Otobi would expand like a mushroom.

It would become another Saganna. A district commissioner, with a staff of Sierra Leonean clerks, sporting majestic adjectives, would descend upon Otobi like a rainbow-hued cloud. There would be a postoffice and a postmaster; a treasury department; a medical officer; a commissioner of Nigerian Constabulary, with a lot of native police; an officer of the W.A.F.F.—West African Frontier Force—with at least half a company of Yoruba soldiermen; barracks and a jail.

The trading beaches would widen their boundaries and multiply, and sleepy Otobi Creek would become black with canoes. All this when the road to Saganna went through.

Danforth, fidgeting in the wicker rocker, looked toward the little man curled up in the deckchair and finally broke the silence.

"Well, since you know so much about it, why don't you say what you think and get it over with?"

Kingdon smiled.

"I'm speechless, Danforth. And my greatest regret is that I must remain speechless. Because it's a story that should be told, even if no one would believe it."

Danforth did not smile. He looked worried, not a little afraid and considerably older than when Kingdon had last seen him. Presently he said very seriously:

"I think I'm scared stiff, Kingdon. I know I ought to laugh—laugh like hell. But I can't even smirk. Particularly now, since you've been so decent as to come so far out of your way just to help me."

"Nonsense, Danforth. I came down here in the interests of my business."

"Did you?" Danforth said dryly. "That's fine. But just the fact that you are here makes me more scared than ever. Because some day when I'm still more senile and you're not around to help dig me out, I know damned well I'm going to stake my shirt on some crazy long shot like that ruddy house lizard up there and—"

"Which one?" Kingdon asked, glancing up the nearest wall of the room to where two small house lizards waited, with unmoving patience, for unwary moths to come their way.

The lizards, as usual, were stationed in opposite corners of the room near the ceiling and, having adapted a pallid green color scheme to match the wall, they were not very easy to see.

"That one." Danforth grunted, and pointed to the lizard that was nearest the door. "Didn't Chief Skin tell you when you saw him at Dowidi how it all started?"

Kingdon shook his head.

"The chief was very reticent. Too reticent. It was what he didn't tell me that made me suspicious."

"What do you mean? How did you find out anything about it if Skin didn't brag about taking me for my shirt?"

"Not your shirt, Danforth," the little man corrected. "Your immortal soul."

"Eh?" Danforth looked more guiltily sheepish than ever. "What do you know about my soul, immortal or otherwise?"

Kingdon laughed, then said almost

gently:

"I've walked along quite a few of the roads you've laid down. Good roads, Danforth, all of them. There's no better road in the country than the road from Segwanga to Sapeli. In fact, I think it is a better road than the best lie you've ever told. And that's a high compliment."

Danforth tried to laugh, but the best he could muster was a doubtful grin. Then he took a long drink and said—

"I'd give something to know how you found out about this if Chief Skin didn't tell you."

"Simple enough," Kingdon said easily. "It so happens that Chief Skin came to me awhile ago, at Saganna, to try to get me to use my influence at government headquarters to save him the expensive necessity of having to halt his trading activities while he supplied you with the labor to get that road of yours started."

"He did? Well, I'll be damned! I suppose the old fox thought it would be good business for both of you if he could dodge the labor draft?"

"Something like that," Kingdon agreed dryly. "And contrary to the general impression harbored in official circles, Danforth, we palm oil traders do not encourage labor draft dodgers—not even when they are as big oil traders as Chief Skin, who can't, of course, furnish you with the labor to build roads and bring us palm oil at the same time."

"No, of course he can't. That's the crux of the whole situation. What did you tell him?"

"I told him he'd have to quit trading for awhile until the Otobi section—his section—of your road was finished. I told him he'd have to obey the law just as lots of other native traders have had to do or take a serious chance of landing in jail."

"You did? What did he say? I'll bet he was as sour as a green apple."

Kingdon sipped his lime juice.

"He didn't like it at all. His business has never been interfered with before and he can be very slow to understand anything he does not want to understand."

"The wily old reprobate!" Danforth exclaimed. "He knows the labor draft

law backward?"

"Of course he does. What he doesn't want to understand is that it applies to him just as much as it does to the small boy native trader who doesn't trade a puncheon of oil a month. He likes to think he's in a class by himself. And around here he's a king. I suppose you've found that out?"

"He's the earth and everything that's in it on this ruddy creek," Danforth growled. "I can't get this lousy road under way a foot until he comes through with those gangs of his."

"No, I didn't think you could," Kingdon agreed mildly. "So when he showed up at Dowidi two days ago with a lot of oil canoes and a great many boys, evidently prepared to go on doing business as usual, I suspected something was wrong, particularly since I knew the date you were supposed to make a start. And, of course, I became still more suspicious when I learned from our shop boy at Dowidi that Skin was also doing his normal volume of business at the Saganna and Segwanga trading beaches and had actually sent a number of canoes as far as Warri and Sapelli."

"The swine!" Danforth came sharply to his feet in righteous indignation. "Scattering my gangs to hell and gone!"

Kingdon smiled and queried dryly—

"Your gangs, Danforth?"

"Well, I—oh, hell! You know what I mean. Or maybe you don't? How did you get on to what really happened if Skin didn't do some bragging?"

"He did a little. But not to me. When I tried to find out why his boys were not at work down here with machetes and shovels instead of paddling his trade canoes all over the shop, he was very cagey. He said the road hadn't begun yet and that he didn't know when it would begin. This sounded very fishy. And as I knew that the road couldn't begin at the Otobi end until he complied with the law and supplied the labor, I thought I'd run down here in the *Sandpiper* and look more closely into the matter."

"That was ruddy decent of you," Danforth mumbled as he sat down again. "And I want you to know that I—"

"Not at all," Kingdon interrupted. "You see, I don't want Chief Skin to find himself on a chain gang. That would be frightful."



DANFORTH grunted and scowled up at the house lizard nearest the door.

Kingdon's smile broadened. "When I reached here," he said, "I found you had started to trudge back to Saganna after about a week of sleepless travail in which—"

"Who told you that?" Danforth came to his feet again. "Have any of my assistants been chattering?"

"Not a word," Kingdon said quietly. "I haven't talked to them about you at all."

"Then who told you about me going without sleep? Can't a man stay awake if he wants to without a lot of busy-bodding old women in pants babbling all over the place about it?"

"Sit down, Danforth, and finish your drink. This particular old woman did not wear pants. He wore a loincloth and answers to the common enough name of Boddó."

"Boddó!" Danforth did not sit down. "Boddó! That *tomba* swigging bushman!"

Kingdon nodded agreeably.

"Boddó does like his *tomba*. But he's never as drunk as he seems to be and his ears are always very keen. He was hanging around outside your door, wasn't he, when Chief Skin came to call?"

"Probably," Danforth conceded with a grunt, and creaked his way back into the wicker rocker. "He's always hanging around somewhere."

Kingdon's lips twitched.

"That's his business."

"What is?"

"Hanging around. But he's very discreet. And he's always the white man's friend. Always. You should cultivate him, Danforth, and learn about Chief Skin from him. Which lizard did you say it was?"

Danforth frowned, then laughed shortly.

"That one," he said; again he indicated the lizard nearest the door. "I thought he was a champion moth catch-

er, but—did Boddo tell you about that?"

"Not specifically," Kingdon answered. "He said it all began in this room. And that after Chief Skin and you had made one bet after another all over the shop for most of the afternoon, Skin left the beach with your road gangs in his pocket." Kingdon smiled. "That's the story, isn't it?"

"Hunh." Danforth emptied his glass and poured himself another drink. "This fellow, Boddo—is he—well, never mind. If he's all right with you I imagine that makes him all right with me."

Danforth studied the amber filled glass in his hand.

"Skin came in around noon that day, all dressed up—orange and black blazer, straw hat tilted over one ear, cane tucked under his arm, yards and yards of his red and gold cloth trailing behind him. You know the get-up? And he was very polite and bibulous. Very. I suppose you've seen him in one of his polite and reckless humors?"

Kingdon nodded, and Danforth went on dryly:

"He said he'd come in to tell me he had everything fixed for me to make a start on the road right on time. His gangs were all lined up and at my disposal—ready to go to work whenever I said the word. So I gave him a drink and let him tell me how good a friend he was of the government and how much he approved of the white man's laws. And while he talked a moth flew into the room."

"Came in through the window, I suppose?"

"I suppose so. But it may have come in by way of the open back door. It was—what ruddy difference does it make which way it came in?"

"None at all," Kingdon said mildly, and took another sip of lime juice. "Go on."

"Hunh," Danforth grunted. "It was a big moth. One of those gray and black fellows, and when it first came in it didn't flutter around as crazily as they usually do. Acted dazed or tired—slowed up, sort of. It was Skin who attracted my attention to it by saying that only so-so lizards would let a moth as big and slow as that one get away

from them."

Danforth's grin was slow and sour.

"And I hung myself on his hook like a novice. I told him that lizard up there—" and once more Danforth indicated the almost invisible little lizard nearest the door—"could catch any moth that came his way. But Skin just shrugged his shoulders and told me my champion moth catcher was no good. He argued with me about it. And then, as if he knew all about lizards and moths, just as a racing tout thinks he knows all about horses, he made his bet."

"Yes? What was it?"

"He said he'd bet me three canoe boys that the moth would get away."

"Canoe boys?" Kingdon queried over the top of his glass. "Canoe boys to him, I suppose. Road laborers to you."

Danforth nodded glumly.

"That's what he said when I asked him about it. He said he needed six boys to send an oil canoe to Dowidi. And he had only three because I was taking all the rest. Three were no use to him and he said I might as well have 'em if my champion lizard was any good."

Danforth laughed and looked up once more at his champion.

"The bet was a new one. The moth was fluttering around the room, flying higher and wilder and—well, maybe I thought I'd like to show Skin I could gamble if he could. That's why I'm scared blue now. Because I don't think at a time like that. I just—well, you've known me long enough."

Kingdon nodded and asked—

"After you accepted the bet, what happened?"

And Danforth answered rather cryptically—

"A carpenter's beetle."

Kingdon sat up.

"You mean—" he laughed—"you mean a carpenter's beetle flew into the room!"

"Like a bullet through the open back door."

"The back door! You're sure about that?"

"Am I? It whirled past my ear as if it had been shot from a gun and then, just as usual, began thumping its hard shell back against the walls. You know

the awful racket they make. I hate the ruddy things. They never seem to know where they're going and if one of them ever cracked you in the eye—" Danforth paused abruptly. "Why did you ask me if I were sure of it coming in by way of the back door?"

"Finish your story," Kingdon said simply. "What happened after the carpenter's beetle flew in?"

"Hunh. What's there to tell? My champion moth catcher doesn't like carpenter's beetles any more than I do. They cramp his style. And in another half minute the moth flew out of the room leaving the beetle in full possession and Skin was three canoe boys to the good."

"I see." Kingdon put his almost empty glass of lime juice down on a nearby table. "And after that Skin and you went out and gambled doubles or quits on different and rather unusual hazards—mostly at Skin's suggestions? He did do most of the suggesting didn't he?"

"All of it. He wouldn't touch cards or dice and any other ideas I had were no good. He wouldn't bet with me on any of them. And, as I had to try to win those ruddy canoe boys back again, I had to play along with him any way he said. Before sundown, after losing half a dozen in a row, I was cleaned out. Skin had the luck of the very devil right from the start."

Kingdon nodded.

"Yes, I'm afraid he had," he said. "And I don't suppose it occurred to you to think, when you took Skin's first bet, that the moth and the carpenter's beetle arrived on some sort of pre-arranged schedule?"

"Eh? What's that?" Danforth sat up so sharply he spilled some of his liquor on his boots. "What did you say?"

"I said that the moth and the beetle—"

"Yes—" hoarsely—"I got that. But are you trying to tell me that Skin—that he—that the whole damned thing was a frameup?"

"I'm afraid it was."

Danforth's chin jerked up a little and he came slowly to his feet, his eyes wide and staring, his memory leaping back to review the half dozen bets he had lost

in one afternoon. For a little while he looked as if he had been poleaxed. Then he took two mechanical steps toward a table with a drawer in it, pulled out the drawer, possessed himself of a service revolver and slammed the drawer back into place again.

Kingdon had not moved and did not move now.

"What are you going to do with that?" he asked mildly.

"I'm going to get my gangs back," Danforth said; then he asked rather thickly, "Where's this fellow, Boddoo? Where can I find him?"

"He's hanging around, I imagine," Kingdon said, rising and walking toward the front door. "Just a minute and I'll call him in."



LESS than an hour later Kingdon's launch, the *Sand-piper*, was slipping away from the government beach wharf on Otobi Creek and was heading into the blackness of midstream in an up-river direction. The engineer, whose color was black and whose name was Jonah, knew what was expected of him and gave the launch her head till she showed her teeth.

In the launch's little cabin Kingdon sat on a bench-like seat, puffing slowly on a pipe, and Danforth, when he sat down at all, occupied a camp chair that was placed just inside the companion leading up to the deck. Between them, sprawling at their feet, and to all appearances completely under the influence of *tomba*, or trade gin, was Boddoo.

Boddoo was a Sobo. At least, he said he was and no one bothered to contradict him. But he could talk a dozen native dialects, and Kingdon, who knew him very well, suspected that Boddoo changed his tribal affiliations to suit almost any occasion.

His wardrobe consisted of a loin-cloth and a tubular bit of coral that was strung upon a piece of twine and fastened tightly about his neck. Beyond this fragment of coral he was utterly without visible possessions.

He slept—not always in peace—when- ever and wherever the fancy seized him; he ate when his gods of the Little Black Well of Barani were good enough to con-

clude that his belly was empty and led his feet in the direction of a free meal; and he drank at all times, in all places, as much as he could beg or steal or even work for.

In short, Boddo was a drunken tramp—a familiar figure on most of the trading and government beaches of the Lower Niger—and Danforth had no faith in him at all.

According to Boddo, who had apparently made it his business to follow Danforth and Chief Skin around the Otobi government beach on a certain memorable afternoon, all of the wagers Danforth and Skin had made had been won by Skin because the wily chief had made appropriate arrangements in advance.

And as the *Sandpiper* flung wide fans of spray from her bows, Danforth's somber recollection of some of those wagers made Boddo's information take on the aspect of a lightning flash in the dark.

There had been the wager on a race between an antiquated rickshaw and a wheelbarrow, both, of course, propelled by man power, the rickshaw containing a corpulent Lagos woman, the wheelbarrow a bag of cement. The race had been an apparently impromptu affair, instigated by the Lagos woman, neither Skin nor Danforth having anything to do with arranging the matter, and it had been run on a concrete path leading down from the back of the government beach to the waterfront.

Danforth, quite naturally, had backed the rickshaw and remembered wondering if Skin were not just a little bit addle pated to think that the wheelbarrow could possibly reach the waterfront before the rickshaw.

However, the rickshaw boy had stubbed his toe or strained an ankle, and though he had limped manfully on, harangued by the Lagos woman, the wheelbarrow had beaten him by two good lengths.

Chief Skin had then turned his attention to the river and specifically to two canoes that had been heading upstream, apparently with the intention of passing the government wharf and proceeding upriver. The canoes had not been racing. One had been a two-

paddle canoe; the other a canoe of eight paddles; and Skin had made a wager that the two-paddle canoe would reach or pass the government wharf first. Danforth had taken this bet because the eight-paddle canoe had been in the lead at the time and evidently had been in more of a hurry than the smaller canoe which contained two women.

And Skin had won because the eight-paddle canoe never had reached or passed the government wharf. It had changed its course, sidled inshore and slipped along the government beach mangrove stick breakwater at least a hundred feet below the wharf. The two-paddle canoe had passed right on upriver and Skin had been ahead a dozen canoe boys.

Three wagers later, on the same double or quits basis, the number had risen to ninety-six, but Chief Skin, out of the great goodness of his heart, had given Danforth one more chance.

Danforth remembered this final wager very distinctly. If Boddo were right, Chief Skin had a genius for surrounding his traps with most unsuspecting camouflage.

The chief had paused with paternal concern to placate an altogether naked small boy who had been bawling lustily for his mother. In the boy's hand was a little tin cup, and in the cup were some ground nuts—just enough to make the business of guessing their number a good sporting hazard. It certainly looked genuine enough.

By that time, too, Danforth had been truly desperate. It had been all or nothing for him. And his estimate of the number of nuts in the cup had really been good enough to win most wagers of the sort. He had been privileged to make the first guess and he had guessed only three nuts too many. But Chief Skin, with uncanny accuracy, had been still nearer to the mark. He had guessed just two too little.

After which, figuratively at least, just as Kingdon had said, Chief Skin had left the government beach with Danforth's road gangs in his pocket.

Danforth thought of all this as he glumly regarded Boddo's sprawling figure, and admitted to himself that there was ample reason to be convinced that

Boddo knew what he was talking about. But Danforth had none of Kingdon's unquestioning faith in the disreputable Sobo's loyalty to the white man. Neither was he in the least optimistic about finding Chief Skin where Boddo had said he would be found—beside the crocodile pool of Saganna. This, from Danforth's viewpoint, was too good to be true. A circumstance sent from heaven and much too coincidental not to be suspicious.



THE crocodile pool of Saganna was a fearsome place. It was a place of judgment and of human sacrifice, and white men were not allowed to know what transpired upon its somber, mangrove curtained shores, principally because black men were not supposed to make anything transpire.

The *Sandpiper*, hurtling at full speed through the black African night, could make the trip in something under two hours; just in time, if Boddo's information were worth anything, to enable them to arrive when the dark and forbidden proceedings on the edge of the pool should be approaching a climax.

Then, provided they succeeded in the very doubtful business of catching Chief Skin in the act of staging some juju hocus-pocus that was against the law, Danforth would be in a position to compel the chief to make one more wager, without involving Boddo or his information at all.

And, of course, neither Boddo nor his information could be allowed to enter into the matter officially. Boddo's life might not be a matter of much importance to any one else, but it doubtless meant something to Boddo; and it would not be worth a grain of kernel dust if Chief Skin ever found out about Boddo's share in his downfall.

Downfall?

Danforth's mind jerked to a full stop, and he came restlessly to his feet. They had to catch Skin first before they could trip him up.

"You seem to be pretty sanguine about all this," he said to Kingdon skeptically. "But I don't like the idea of you risking your neck to haul me out of a hole. I have everything to gain

and not much of anything to lose if we do or don't pull it off, but you—"

Kingdon interrupted him with a deprecating wave of his pipe.

"Nonsense, Danforth. I've always wanted to attend one of those crocodile pool affairs, but never, somehow, got around to it. Now's my chance. This opportunity is a godsend in more ways than one. We want to catch old Skin napping and along comes Boddo and a juju palaver! Why, we'd be guilty of criminal negligence if we didn't make the most of it. Leave it to Boddo." Kingdon pointed his pipe at the sprawling Sobo. "Is he showing any signs of excitement?"

"Hunh," Danforth grumbled disgustedly. "He's too drunk to know what he's doing."

"Not drunk, Danforth. Inspired. And he isn't asleep. He's thinking. He does all his best thinking lying on his belly like that."

Danforth shrugged his shoulders, somberly regarded the nearly naked wreck of humanity at his feet, then looked toward Kingdon again.

"I hope you have a trick or two up your own sleeve, and are not depending too much on him."

Kingdon smiled.

"He hasn't any sleeves. But he has several tricks. He's full of them. And one of them is working very well—right now."

"Eh? Which one?"

"The one that's compelling you to believe he's as drunk and unreliable as he looks. It's taken him years to perfect that trick."

Danforth snorted in complete disapproval, lighted a cigaret nervously and sat down again.

"Hanged if I can see anything funny in this," he growled. "Must have mislaid my sense of humor or something."

"Not necessarily. You'd just like to wring Skin's neck and not be at all subtle about it."

Danforth's chin came up with a jerk. His eyes glowed with a hunger for violence.

"You're damned right I would!"

Kingdon laughed, and even Boddo stirred a little. The *Sandpiper*, as if in sympathy with Danforth's point of

view, plunged still faster through the moonless dark—a dark that would be still darker where the crocodile pool of Saganna passed judgment on the sins of men.



AT THE entrance to a path that was screened from view by a curtain of overhanging mangroves, they left the launch in charge of the colored engineer and followed Boddo.

The path, not much wider than a paddle blade, led with surreptitious guile and rather surprising suddenness to the palm fringed edge of a small lake that had an island in the middle of it.

This island, a fair stone's throw from shore, was known as Crocodile Island, and the lake or pool, somber and black even in the daytime, was referred to in whispers as the Black Water of Saganna. The faint rustle of palm fronds kept up an eternal whispering chorus all about this pool and only juju priests or witch doctors lifted their voices above the voices of the palms.

Of course, some of those who had died there had cried out loudly enough; that is, those who still had tongues or were not hypnotized by the arts of the priestly magicians.

Many men, to decide their guilt or innocence, particularly in matters of offenses against the person or property of a chief, had plunged into the Black Water of Saganna and had endeavored to swim past Crocodile Island and reach the opposite bank, where a kind of priestly jury awaited to pronounce them wholly innocent on their arrival.

And a scattered few actually had arrived, much to the consternation of the witch doctors. But the great majority rarely proceeded even as far as the island. It depended upon the appetite of the crocodiles, and they were usually, on occasions of the sort, very hungry.

Danforth, following Kingdon, who kept close to Boddo's heels, found himself within a scant few yards from the edge of the pool almost before he quite realized that the little journey from the launch had begun—this in spite of the fact that he had become once more conscious of his feet.

Boddo and Kingdon had come to a halt within the shadow of a clump of palms where, for a minute or so, they paused, silent, motionless, scarcely drawing breath.

Not fifty yards away, off to the left, upon a little wharf-like structure that was just vaguely defined in the light of several smoky and uncertain hurricane lanterns, stood a small group of natives. Their formation was that of a rough semicircle, and only two of their number had any marked individuality in the dim, flickering light of the lanterns.

One of those, because of the fearsome geegaws of his craft and the faintly discernible rings of white chalk around his eyes, was a witch doctor. The other, because of his height and the straw hat and blazer he wore, was undoubtedly Chief Skin.

Danforth gripped Kingdon's arm and breathed—

"He's there!"

Kingdon made no reply. Since Boddo had never lied to him before, the fact that Chief Skin actually was on the little wharf that jutted out over the Black Water of Saganna, was no surprise to him. He laid a hand on Boddo's shoulder and the Sobo turned his head.

"Be besser you go foh launch," Kingdon told him in a whisper. "Be all ri' now. We go fix um."

"Wait li'l bit," Boddo cautioned. "They go put man foh water. I go look out foh dat."

"What you go do?"

Boddo did not say what he was going to do. But, quite evidently, he had something very definite in mind because, in a mixture of pidgin English and Sobo, he whispered to Kingdon to wait until the man on trial on the wharf had actually been committed to the water and sent on his hideous journey to prove his guilt or innocence.

"Then," Boddo added wisely, "you go catchum Skin proper. He go fear. All man go fear. They go be small-small. They go run 'way. You be Kingdon! You be big cap'n! You be big man foh dis country and all black man fear you plenty too much. Eh-heh!"

All this in a whisper in Kingdon's ear; and the Sobo quite apparently did not doubt for a moment the effect King-

don's appearance on the scene would have upon the natives on the wharf.

Kingdon hoped he was right. He hoped also that Boddo's plan—whatever it was—to take care of the man on trial would not be interfered with by a hungry crocodile. This phase of the matter gave Kingdon no little concern. He did not like the thought of standing by and waiting until the poor shivering devil on the wharf had been thrown to the mercy of all that that ghastly pool held for him. But when he thought of Boddo's very persistent interest in Chief Skin's movements, and in the whole affair, he had a suspicion that there was not very much of that interest that was in the least coincidental.

Boddo had known too much about Skin's movements for that. It was the kind of knowledge, too, that must have been deliberately acquired; very possibly for a specific purpose. And Kingdon suspected that, if anything at all had been the result of fortuitous circumstances, it had been his own sudden inspiration to run down to Otobi and find out why Chief Skin was still trading in oil instead of building roads.

In fact, as he stood there, watching the group on the wharf and trying to make up his mind, Kingdon felt suddenly that, instead of being a directing force in this affair, he was really just a very necessary pawn which Boddo, as well as Danforth, was using in a desperate game of his own. A game, Kingdon thought now with a slight, grim smile, that had probably begun some little time before Chief Skin had descended upon Danforth with a gray-black moth and a carpenter's beetle. Of course, all this was mostly hypothetical, but in any event—

"What are we waiting for?" Danforth said suddenly, and his right hand covered the butt of his service revolver which as yet reposed in its holster. "Skin's there all right. I'd like to chuck the swine to the crocs. Let's get him."

"Sh! Wait!" Kingdon cautioned and prayed that his faith in Boddo's wisdom and gifts of truth was not misplaced. "I'll tell you when to move."

Danforth paused, but in a moment his left hand gripped Kingdon's shoulder.

"Hell, man! They'll throw some poor

devil into the water if we don't get a move on. Listen to that ruddy witch doctor. He's working himself up to something pretty bloody, and we can't stand by and let them get away with murder!"

The witch doctor was making himself heard now in no uncertain fashion, his voice lifting from a low monotone to a shrill crescendo, then, falling away almost to a whisper, gradually rose again to reach a higher note than before.

The other figures on the wharf huddled nearer to its edge, and somewhere in their midst, obscured from view, was the man who was on trial for his life. Chief Skin, tall, commanding but undoubtedly suave and unruffled as usual, stood apart from the jury-like group that appeared to be waiting a signal of some sort—a sign that would empower them to hurl the victim on his way to as ghastly a death as any one could conceive.

Danforth's grip on Kingdon's shoulder tightened.

"I can't stand this!" he said thickly. "I'm not going to let that lousy black swine get away with—"

"Sh! Boddo knows. We'll move in a minute."

"In a—my God! Look! He's gone!"

So was Kingdon. The victim of the ceremony on the wharf had hardly hit the water when Kingdon, leaping out of a clump of palms and running at top speed, was racing toward the peering, excitedly whispering group on the wharf.

Danforth followed, gun in hand, and Boddo, slithering off at a tangent, vanished somewhere in the dark toward the water.

Kingdon carried no weapon of any sort. He never did. And Danforth, knowing this, called out in a hoarse whisper:

"Wait! Let me take the lead. I have a gun."

The little man ahead paid no heed, and the sound of their running feet was not long in communicating itself to the natives on the wharf in spite of their staring interest in the man who had just been flung into the water.

Heads turned, voices whispered a moment, then lifted, and the instant it was known that the runners were white men,

several of the voices at once were stilled and the sharp patter of naked feet heading in a rush from the wharf into the jungle paths behind it injected a new note into the proceedings.

Less than a minute later, when Kingdon and Danforth raced on to the wharf from the rear, considerably more than half of the "jurors" had scattered into the dark, the shrill voiced witch doctor among them.

Chief Skin was too heavy, and perhaps too dignified, to run; and those who remained with him did so because, if anything, they were more afraid of him than of the pains and penalties of the white man's laws.

All interest in the victim of the recent ceremony had died. Died suddenly and completely. Somewhere out in the treacherous blackness of the dread pool a shivering frightened human was swimming for his very life, but none of the natives left on the wharf, from Skin downward, looked in that direction.

They were too intent upon staring at Kingdon as if he were some sort of dire avenging spirit that had sprung most mysteriously out of nowhere to confront them in their guilt.



NO DEMONSTRATION could have been more complimentary to Kingdon than the dead, motionless silence that fell upon them as the little man strode toward them. At sight of him, with Danforth looming darkly behind him, they huddled about Skin not unlike a brood of chickens around a mother hen. And apparently they were not armed, although a number of concealed knives would doubtless have leaped into view if Kingdon had not been Kingdon and Danforth's gun had not glinted dully in the dim light of the two hurricane lanterns that remained.

Chief Skin's color had taken on the hue of wet ashes. His heavily hung under jaw sagged and, for a moment or two, the life and most of his commanding dignity had gone out of him. Even his head hat, in the excitement, seemed to have been jolted out of its customary jaunty angle.

Kingdon, too, as he faced the group, was pale; breathing a little faster than

usual, but otherwise coldly calm, his mouth a tightly fixed line.

"Hello, Skin," he said quietly enough. "You put some man foh water?"

Skin licked his dry lips, glanced past Kingdon toward Danforth, and even the eternally whispering palms around the pool seemed to hold their breath in the silence that followed.

"No—no be—man," Skin said at last thickly, with the glint of the gun in Danforth's hands coming sharply into focus. "We—we make juju. It be—it be—goat—juju."

A sharp, hissing indrawn breath of relief answered this, and all at once, seizing upon Skin's inspiration, other smaller, parrot-like voices about him took up the refrain.

"Be so! Be goat juju. No be man. Be goat juju."

"You're a liar!" Danforth interjected, and his gun came up with a menacing jerk aimed directly at Skin's midsection. "You're a dirty, murdering, cheating liar! Damn your hide! I'd like to—"

"Just a minute, Danforth," Kingdon broke in quietly and, wondering what Boddoo was doing, prayed for the peace of his own soul that the Sobo had not lied. "It won't do any good to knock his head off. At least, not until you get your gangs back again. Make your wager and let's get that over with. Hurry."

"Hunh. The oily swine!" Danforth shifted his gun from his right hand to his left, dipped into his trousers' pocket and brought forth the silver English crown. He held it up for Skin to see.

"See that?"

The chief peered at the coin that was held between the thumb and index finger of Danforth's right hand.

"I look um," Skin acknowledged, and obviously wondered at the sudden twist in the drama of the moment. "Be money. White man money. What you go do?"

"You and me," Danforth said slowly, "we go make bet. Double or quits. For canoe boys. *Savez?*"

Chief Skin's eyes popped wide, then narrowed and his glance shifted to Kingdon. But Kingdon said nothing, looked nothing. He was scarcely thinking of Skin or of Danforth just then. He was

thinking of Boddo and of the poor, possibly panic-stricken devil in the water; and he was wishing Danforth would hurry up so that they could find out if it were all right with Chief Skin's intended victim.

The chief's eyes roved dubiously back to Danforth.

"Bet palaver finis," he said. "I no go bet foh dis place."

"You go bet, you thieving swine, or I go throw you for water. *Savez?*"

"*Chal* I be chief! I be—"

"Shut up!" Danforth snapped. "You and me go bet for canoe boys, one time. Double or quits!"

"*E-yaw!* I no fit. Dis place be juju. I go lose um bet foh dis place."

"You can wager your damned life you're going to lose," Danforth said grimly. "I go throw this money for Crocodile Island. *Savez?*"

"*Chal!*"

"And you go bet me I can't do it."

"*E-yaw! Yellal! Yellal!* I no fit to bet so!"

"You go bet so," Danforth said decidedly. "I took all your ruddy bets. Now you go take one of mine. You take um? Double or quits? For canoe boys?"

Chief Skin's lips moved, but he made no sound. He knew that, somehow or other, Danforth had found him out and was stacking the cards against him. And there, on the edge of the Black Water of Saganna, with Kingdon a cold and silent witness to his downfall, he knew also that he did not have a chance to refuse Danforth's wager, or any chance at all to win because almost any one could have thrown Danforth's prized pocket piece on to Crocodile Island from the wharf.

What Skin did not know was that Danforth had no intention of throwing the coin at all. Instead, he would merely make a bluff of doing so and, adroitly palming his precious coin in the act of throwing, would make "the swiftness of the hand deceive the eye."

"How I *savez* if you throw dat money foh island," Skin asked desperately, though he knew the answer in advance.

Danforth's grin was slow and sour.

"You can swim foh island and find out," he said dryly. "We go bet now?"

Skin swallowed hard, tried to look Kingdon in the face, tried to get the glint of Danforth's gun out of his eyes, paused a long, hopeless moment, then croaked in a barely audible voice:

"Allri'. We go bet."

"Good. Double or quits. For canoe boys."

Danforth strode past Kingdon and past Skin to the edge of the wharf, always careful to see to it that none of Chief Skin's supporters took a notion to be disagreeable. He stood far enough away from them to make any sudden action inadvisable and also to prevent Skin from watching his hand too closely.

Kingdon, peering anxiously off toward the right, did not see Danforth draw his hand back slowly in a throwing gesture or see the hand swing sharply forward for the throw.

"Damn!"

The expletive, partially drowned by a groan from Skin and his satellites, was Danforth's. Kingdon turned his head and saw Danforth standing as if transfixed, a look of genuine alarm upon his face. His cupped right hand hung limply at his side. Then, still with a staring unbelief in his eyes, he turned abruptly and savagely toward Chief Skin.

"I win," he rasped sharply. "*Savez? Do I win?*"

"Ye—yessah," Chief Skin said respectfully.

"All right," savagely. "Get to hell out of here! Get out! And bring canoe boys for gov'ment beach morning time!"

"Yessah. I bring um. We go now. Yessah."

"Edge!" Danforth flourished his gun as if he would have enjoyed an excuse to use it. "Make quick! One time!"

And Skin departed. He was trembling with rage and with a crushing sense of futility, but he did not pause to analyze his sensations or desires. There was a curse upon the place and upon the night and the little soul within him shivered with apprehension as he hastily left the wharf and disappeared with his whispering followers into a path that plunged straight into the jungle.

Kingdon watched them go from the rear of the little wharf, satisfied himself that they were gone, then turned swift-

ly toward the clump of palms, calling to Danforth to follow.

Danforth lingered, staring out over the water toward Crocodile Island. Presently he might have been heard to mutter as he followed Kingdon:

"There's a juju on this ruddy place all right. Damned if I don't believe I actually won that bet!"

His right hand, still hanging limply cupped at his side, was empty.

Danforth had abdicated. His crown was gone.



KINGDON found Boddo waiting for him; Boddo and another native who sat upon the ground, his back against a palm, while his breath came in convulsive, sobbing gasps. This native did not rise when Kingdon approached. The grip of fear was still about his throat and it was several minutes before Boddo, silent and uncommunicative, brought the man to his feet and led the way back to the *Sandpiper*.

Kingdon asked no questions then, and Danforth, bringing up the rear and muttering disconsolately to himself, seemed to have his mind on other matters.

But in the *Sandpiper's* little cabin, with both Boddo and Skin's intended victim warming up under the influence of some of the contents of a flask Danforth carried, Boddo squatted at Kingdon's feet and said simply—

"He be my brudder."

"Your brother, eh?"

"Yessah. Skin no like um. Skin say he be thief. Skin say he put bad medicine foh him chop. But that be so-so lie. My brudder no do so. But Skin make juju foh him and take him foh Black Water side. And now my brudder done die," Boddo concluded cryptically.

"Dead!" Danforth exclaimed. "He looks pretty much alive to me."

Boddo shrugged his shoulders, and Kingdon smiled understandingly.

"He means his brother is officially dead," he said. "So that Skin won't be in the least likely to look for him. And, if you think it over a little, you'll find that Boddo, who is very wise, carefully fixed it that way. No one on that wharf

knew what happened to his brother after he hit the water." Kingdon looked toward Boddo. "Did your brother *savez* you go bring us for dat place?"

"He no *savez* dat," Boddo said complacently. "But he *savez* you and me go fixum proper."

"I see," Kingdon said dryly. "And your brother no swim for island li'l bit? He swim for pool side one time?"

"Yessah. I go foh water. I catchum. I bring him foh dat place where you look um first time. He fear that juju plenty."

"I don't blame him," Kingdon said fervently. "And, of course, he didn't have your abiding faith in Providence—or whatever it is you pray to. Give them another drink, Danforth, and while you are at it you might apologize to Boddo for calling him names earlier in the evening. He won your gangs back for you."

Danforth parted with the liquor, but his expression was sour and became still more so when Kingdon asked:

"By the way, what made you swear when you bluffed throwing that ancient crown of yours to Crocodile Island?"

Danforth paused.

"Bluff nothing," he growled. "The damned thing slipped out of my hand and is probably lying somewhere on Crocodile Island right now."

Kingdon tilted his head back and laughed.

And he was still laughing when Boddo and his officially dead brother had vanished in a canoe toward a new horizon that would doubtless be as far removed from Otobi as possible.

But Danforth could see no humor in the adventure. Not yet. Nor for several weeks thereafter, until the Otobi road was well under way. Then Danforth, in his own way, began to see the light; a light that sparkled and glowed from a crown of many, many jewels.

And if you chance to meet him sometime, it is not impossible that he will tell you the story of the crocs that cost him a crown. It won't be this story or anything like it. The opening sentence varies, according to the audience, but most frequently it begins with—

"Once I had a chance to be a king and wear a crown."

And more often than one would think, he gets away with it.

The Belfry

By

ALLAN
VAUGHAN
ELSTON



RAIN fell in a steady downpour, and by midnight the ridge was a morass of mud. The gnarled post-oaks which covered it were soaked to saturation, and dripped, dripped, dripped. Under one of the whitest and crookedest of these post-oaks stood Clint Ringle. He was drenched. He was desperate. A streak of light zigzagged through the sky, showing for an instant his face, whiter than the bark against which he cringed.

The rain had washed the stain of murder from his hands, but the ghastly guilt of it was still mirrored starkly in his eyes. Forty men were scouring this ridge for him, and he knew it. He knew and they knew that he, Clint Ringle, had killed Walt Norton. There had been no more deservedly popular citizen in Ozark County than Walt Norton. And so by now the posse would be a grim crew, their tempers fretted by mud and rain, many of them ready to deal justice here and now to Clinton Ringle.

This dashing downpour, though it drenched and chilled Ringle, favored his escape. Without it, hounds no doubt would already have run him down. With it, at least until dawn, posses could only beat blindly through these twenty sections of oak which sheltered him.

Another bolt of light crashed through

the sky, showing unnumbered white barked boles exactly like that by which Ringle stood. He was in a glade of the forest where he had paused for breath, and to watch in all directions for the lanterns of the men who were pursuing him.

The night, except for spasmodic lightning, was like ink. Except for the occasional thunder, the only sound was the drumming of rain. Ringle's nerves were ragged. Great drops of sweat seeped from his brow, while drops of rain dripped from the tree above him, falling again from the downturned brim of his hat. He pulled his coat collar high over his ears and hunched his shoulders. Crouched wretchedly, he considered his further retreat.

Should he press south toward the Arkansas line? Or east to the North Fork? The North Fork, he knew, would be a raging and impassable flood. However, he might possibly steal a skiff and float downstream. Or he could head west and make for the State line by way of 'Possums' Walk Hollow.

Forlornly he conceded that the posses would expect him to take one of these obvious avenues of escape. Each route would be well covered. Therefore his only chance was to select an unexpected course. And quickly! Whatever his

dodge, he must make it while darkness and rain were his allies.

Dawn, he knew, would bring more men—and hounds. Soon they would find the adz with which the day before he had been dressing timbers, and with which late in the afternoon he had killed Walt Norton. Ringle, in his panicky flight, had carried the adz a good two miles from the crime before heaving it away. Soon after dawn a posse would surely find it. And at that spot hounds would be assembled.

But could hounds follow a trail on which rain had beaten all night? What matter if they couldn't, since Ringle had left a track of deep footprints in the mud! Footprints would lead to this tree, and on in any direction which he chose to take. Escape was hopeless, unless—

The ghost of a plan came to Ringle just as he heard voices and saw lanterns in the distance. A posse was moving toward him. He could hear boots sucking soggly at the mud. They were bearing almost directly upon the tree under which he stood.

A minute earlier Ringle would have dashed off in headlong panic. Now, with the ghost of a plan flitting through the dark shadows of his brain, he stood pat. Rather, he swung himself to the lower branch of this gnarled and knotty post-oak, and thence climbed a crotch or two higher.

He flattened against the bole of it. Shivering, he waited, his pulse pounding. A crash of thunder seemed to smother the woods as lightning streaked through the sky. In the flash, Ringle saw eight or nine men approaching not fifty yards away. Even in that brief instant he recognized the leader—Elmer Norton. The look on Elmer's face terrified Ringle. It bespoke a grim determination to wreak speedy vengeance. With Elmer no doubt were other Norton kinsmen. For an instant Ringle could see himself dangling from one of these gaunt, crooked oak limbs.

Another flash, then rain came down with renewed fury. It caused the posse to pause awhile, taking shelter directly beneath Ringle. He could see them plainly enough, because four of the nine men carried lanterns. Each of the nine

was armed with either a shotgun or rifle.

And each of the nine was as wet and bedraggled as Ringle. Occasionally a syllable of malediction reached his ears, bringing new terror. And occasionally a flash of lightning exposed him there, perching in the tree. Rigid and breathless he waited, unseen only because of the drooping, dripping hatbrims of the possemen. All this while the rain fell in sheets, beating on the forest like a roll of drums.



AT EACH streak of lightning Ringle could see the great oak trees, rank upon rank, surrounding him on all sides. Except for a sprinkling of red oak, black oak, burr oak and pin oak, they were mostly the white, shaggy, crooked post-oaks of an Ozark ridge. And every one of those gnarled white arms seemed to be reaching toward him.

Suddenly the voice of Elmer Norton, kinsman of Ringle's victim, burst forth in despairing bitterness:

"Let me get a hand on him, that's all I ask! I'll—"

Thunder crashed, drowning the voice. With it came a blinding bolt squarely down upon them. It struck the snag top of a half dead black oak only fifty yards away, splitting it like stove wood, igniting a blaze for a moment until rain quenched it.

The deadly, awful threat of the lightning almost paralyzed Ringle. It shocked him both physically and mentally, and he nearly toppled from his hiding place.

It must have awed the least bold of those below. With a break in his voice one said—

"Come on, Elmer; we ain't gittin' nowhere standin' here."

Thus the nine men, without waiting for a slackening of the rain, walked out from under the oak and went on.

Before they had gone far Ringle slid to the ground. Then, in pursuance of his plan of escape, he followed directly in the wake of the posse.

He made footprints of his own directly over those of nine men who were beating the bush for him. No one, he was sure, would be able to tell the

tracks of nine from the tracks of ten.

With this ruse he hoped to defeat the eyes of men on the morrow, just as he was depending upon rain to cheat the hounds. Surely no one would expect him to trail directly in the wake of his pursuers.

Because of their lanterns and occasional voices, it was easy enough to do. Their own trampings and splashings in the mud, plus the battering of the rain, kept them from hearing Ringle. He followed them at about forty paces. As he did so, he considered the second maneuver in his program of ultimate escape.

This dodge, even more than the first, would be a thing they'd never expect. It was incredibly bold, yet simple. It was based upon the probability that these nine men would, before dawn, return to the base from which they had started, the rural schoolhouse which, being the scene of the crime, was naturally the hub of the search.

Many indignant neighbors, no doubt, were there now. All night groups of them had been diverging from that hub to scour the woods, returning anon to exchange reports and theories with other groups, to drink hot coffee and to dry their garments by the schoolhouse fire.

After the present downpour, Ringle guessed that it wouldn't be long before this particular group would be circling back toward that fire.

"Wonder 'f the sheriff's showed up yit," Ringle heard a voice say.

And the answer:

"Reckon he has, Lem. And Jeff Strang with his pups. Maybe we'd orter drift back there and git organized."

"We ain't doin' no good here," grumbled another.

"This here lantern o' mine's runnin' outa oil," complained another.

Another coughed. At the next swift gust of rain the group veered well to the right. Soon by common consent they were plodding in the general direction of the schoolhouse.

Now, after midnight, it seemed to Ringle a wretched age since he had killed Walter Norton at the door of that school. The actual interval was but eight hours. Ringle had been trimming

timbers nearby, and had strolled by the schoolhouse at closing time with his adz over his shoulder. His object had been to walk home with the comely teacher, Ella Marsh.

The children had already trooped away to their various farms; and Miss Marsh was just locking the school when Ringle appeared, offering himself as escort. His temper had flamed at her words:

"It won't hardly be right for you to call for me any more, Clint, because—" It was after looking shyly down at the third finger of her left hand that she added, "Walt gave it to me; we aim to be married in June."

At that moment Walter Norton himself, happy and handsome, had appeared from around the corner of the building. Ringle had always hated him, had always been jealous of him. Even as a boy, Clint Ringle's own parents had been in the habit of holding up Walt Norton as an example. Honors and favors had accrued to Norton; only failure to Ringle.

Yesterday at four o'clock, at the steps of the schoolhouse, the seething, sullen hatred of years had burst its bonds. Norton's joyous manner had not been meant to taunt Ringle, but did; in an instant of insane jealousy Ringle threw his adz at Norton's head.

The blade bit deep, and Norton fell dead on the steps. Ella Marsh swayed there for a moment in horror, then fainted.

She was, thought Ringle, the only witness. He was furious at her as well as at Norton. Insane with rage, he picked up the adz and turned murderously toward the swooning girl. A scream from the edge of the woods saved her. Ringle, whirling, saw a ten-year-old boy who, halfway home, had recalled leaving his slingshot on the playground. Returning for it, he had witnessed Norton's murder.

The boy now scampered off to alarm the nearest farm. And Clint Ringle, without harming the teacher, took the opposite direction. For two miles he carried the adz with a wild idea of using it in his own defense; then, realizing it would be no good against guns, he threw it away. Rain came, and then darkness.

It was just as he threw away the adz that Ringle heard, afar off, the tolling of the schoolhouse bell. An alarm! He knew it would summon every man in the district.

And now, eight hours later, Clint Ringle was creeping back toward this hub of the search for him.



Lightning streaked, and he glimpsed the nine men trooping ahead. Had one of them chanced to look back at that illuminated moment he might have seen Ringle.

After a long while the posse came to the edge of the clearing in the center of which stood the schoolhouse. It was utterly isolated, as rural schools are likely to be in the Ozark hills. This was a structure of one long room with a gabled roof. At the forward end of the roof was a stone chimney; at the rear end a belfry. Five days a week this place was a school and on Sundays it served as a church.

Through a window Ringle could see men milling about, no doubt during an expression of indignation against him. The nine men whom he had followed for the past hour went directly to the front door and entered.

Ringle himself circled to the rear end of the house. There he crept directly to a woodshed which in effect was a lean-to against the back of the school. A sawbuck was there for sawing stove wood, and Ringle dragged it to the wall of the shed. From it he clambered to the shed roof, then pulled himself to the sloping roof of the school itself. He had no fear that those inside would hear him, for rain was beating furiously upon the shingles.

He climbed the roof slope. There, projecting through the ridge at the rear of the roof, was the belfry, a rude tower, or cupola, only large enough to permit the swinging of a huge bell suspended within it.

Ringle climbed over the belfry railing and slid down into the space beneath the bell. Doing so, his shoulder collided with the bell and set it swaying. Frantically he snatched the clapper, holding it, thus forestalling the ringing of the bell.

A peal of the bell would be bound to bring men up to see what caused it. So Ringle removed his wet and soggy coat, made a roll of it and crammed it inside the cone of the bell. This wedge would prevent the bell from ringing in case he jostled it again.

The bell itself was about fifteen inches high, a cone of metal perhaps forty pounds in weight. A rope to the schoolroom below operated it by tripping a spindle from which the fulcrum of swing was about two feet. Thus the bell would ring with a roaring resonance and carry to faraway farms of the ridge.

Ringle now found that he could not stand upright in the belfry without touching the bell. The place was meant only for the bell. But there were three clear feet between the bell and the belfry floor, and in this space Ringle could easily crouch. When he knelt with his back to the bell his eyes came to the level of the belfry rail, with just enough space for his head between bell and rail.

By doubling like a jackknife he could lie on the floor, but his most comfortable posture was to sit with his back against a wall and his legs reaching out under the bell.

The belfry roof provided fair shelter from the shower. He caught drippings of rain in his hat, and drank. All through the night rain had befriended him. Right now it was drenching men who beat the woods for him, while he himself was snugly perched at the very headquarters of the hunt.

Nor was he afraid that they could read his tracks at the place where he had approached the shed. Many trips must have been made that night to the woodshed, and in the confusion of tracks his own would be meaningless.

For an hour or more he crouched under the bell.

The rain at last slackened, and for awhile it drizzled lightly on the shingles. Ringle's ears were keen. In the comparative stillness he caught an occasional phrase from below.

"Wonder what's keepin' the sheriff?"

"More coffee, Ed?"

"Anybody know which way the Blake boys went?"

"They tuk off down the 'Possums'

Walk, Joe."

"Humph! They'd do better to try North Fork."

"Nope, Ed, my idear is that Ringle's holed up in some holler log."

Then Ringle heard a group of men tramp in from a tour of the woods. Later Elmer Norton's party, warmed and rested, set forth again. And at about three in the morning the sheriff arrived from Gainesville.

He brought dogs; Ringle heard them yelping. But up in the belfry he felt safe from dogs—and from men, as long as he kept quiet. Every inch of the ridge would be searched—except directly under the bell that had sounded the alarm of his crime.

Ringle heard the sheriff shouting orders. He heard new posses being organized and launched.

"Whoever finds him report here," yelled the sheriff. "Then ring the bell and call everybody else in."

For a moment Ringle thought he'd better take his coat out of the bell, lest some one try to ring it. A vain try to ring the bell would expose him. On the other hand, the bell was only to be rung in announcement of the capture. Since they could not capture him without first coming to the belfry, why should he remove his coat?

So he left it there, a safeguard against the ever present danger of jostling the bell.



RINGLE now curled on the floor of the belfry. Later he heard a renewed and furious onslaught of the rain. Still later, just at dawn, the rain slackened again to a gentle patter on the roof.

The light gained. He heard returning posses. He heard outgoing posses. He heard the neighing of horses tethered at the hitch-rack and the jingling of their bits. Once he heard a man curse when some one turned over a pot of hot coffee and scalded his wrist. Generally, however, there was a tone of sober restraint in the voices which came from the room below.

"Don't reckon they'll be no school today," spoke some one.

"Nope. Ella, she tuk to bed. All broke up, she is, about Walt. But she'll

need her eighty a month, now, worse'n ever. So tomorrow she'll be right on the job, here, and so will the kids."

"Might as well," answered a voice. "If Ringle ain't rounded up by then it'll mean he's outa the county."

Ringle got very carefully to his knees and peered over the rail of the belfry. He saw, in all directions, a mist rising from the woods. He saw a hitch-rack, where a dozen horses were standing deep in the mud. To the east he saw a row of poplars, the only trees in sight which had been planted by man. This hedge of poplars, Ringle knew, screened a graveyard. A group of be-draggled men, wearing slickers, came through this hedge and approached the schoolhouse. One of them held a leashed hound, its wide ears drooping, its eyes mournful and discouraged.

Not to risk being seen, Ringle dodged down; in doing so he bumped the back of his head on the bell, but started no ringing because of the wet coat wedged within.

Hunger now began to assail him. There was no help for it. Today he must fast; tonight he could descend in the dark and forage for food. There was, he knew, a waste can just back of the school where the children discarded scraps of lunch. And these posse-men would, no doubt, be throwing away scraps. Ringle could descend only for a minute each of the next three nights and salvage these crumbs of food. Then, in each instance, he would immediately climb back to the belfry.

For his plan was to hide here four days. By then the hue and cry would have burned itself out. By then every deserted farm in this and adjoining counties would have been searched. Once searched, they would not be searched again. Ringle could, after the passing of four days, prowl from one deserted farm to another and in time get safely away.

Were he lurking at some deserted farm now, his capture would be inevitable. Thus it was sound strategy to wait here four full days in the belfry.

Today, he reflected, was Thursday. All day the local search would be intense and dangerous. By evening it would begin to subside.

Tomorrow, Friday, school would be resumed, but a few dogged men would still be beating the nearby bush for Ringle. Saturday fewer searchers would be alert, and Sunday still fewer. It would be discreet, he decided, to remain in the belfry at least until midnight Sunday.

That first day, Thursday, rain fell intermittently. Fear and hunger tormented him as he crouched under the bell. More than once, stretching, he bumped his elbow or head against the bell. Only the coat wadded into it saved him from sounding the knell of his own doom.

About noon a searcher came in with Ringle's adz. Ringle heard a posse of men, with hounds on leash, being directed to the spot.

Toward sundown they returned, bearded and weary.

"The rain killed his scent," Ringle heard a deputy report. "We found his tracks all right. Follered 'em to somewhere near that black oak snag that got split by lightning, then lost 'em. Some one in our own crowd bailed them tracks, balled 'em to where we can't tell which is which."

"But he was headin' fer Arkansaw, all right," said another.

"In which case they ain't no use hangin' around here no more," answered the Gainesville sheriff. "I'll go git in touch with the sheriffs at Mountain Home, Salem and Evenin' Shade."

An hour later the schoolhouse was locked, deserted by all except Ringle. Men were still searching nearby, but henceforth they would use the sheriff's office at Gainesville as headquarters.

Dark came to the woods. It was still drizzling rain. Ringle now climbed from the belfry to the sloping roof, and thence slid to the roof of the lean-to. From there he dropped to the ground.

He drank deeply from the oaken bucket at the school well. Then, in the refuse can, he found crusts of bread and several half eaten apples. He wolfed the bread, then stuffed the apples in his pockets. Rummaging, he found more scraps and made a package of them. With this tied at his belt he again ascended to the belfry.

Curled on the belfry floor, he tried

to sleep, but couldn't. His situation was still too perilous; capture and conviction were still too near. Suddenly he realized that stars were shining and that water no longer dripped from the eaves.

So he again descended to the ground. He drank again at the well, then found an old jug in the woodshed. He filled it with water and took it with him to the belfry. He was now fortified against both hunger and thirst.

But still the tension of his plight kept him from sleeping. His nerves were like devils jumping on his brain.



FRIDAY dawned brightly.

Arising to peer out, Ringle again bumped his head on the bell. This time he jarred the coat out and almost sounded the bell. He shivered. It would be a grim irony, he thought, if he himself should sound the signal which, by neighborhood agreement, would announce his capture.

He stuffed the coat back into the bell and resolved to be more careful.

The sun climbed higher, making a snug and warm nest of the belfry. Peril, too, was abating with every passing hour. True, children would soon be at the school, and Ella Marsh; but why should any of these visit the belfry?

As for the men, they would be searching in ever wider circles. The farms within fifty miles that hadn't been searched yesterday would be searched today and tomorrow, or Sunday at the very latest. After Sunday there should be a clear track for the flight.

Soon Ringle heard childish voices. He peered out and saw the three Grinstead youngsters, two boys and a girl, coming along with lunch pails, their steps not too confident. Other children came, and they stood apart unnaturally subdued. This house, once so delightfully familiar, now awed them. They did not play and romp before school time as they used to.

And then Ringle saw Ella Marsh coming afoot from the direction of Carmody's Mill, where she boarded. She was pale and haggard; by her eyes she might have been crying for the past thirty-six hours. But she came on as if braving an ordeal dreadful yet inevitable, to the very steps where Ringle

had felled Norton.

There she passed from Ringle's sight. In a moment he heard her within the building, sweeping out the mud which the posses had tramped upon the floor.

He peered again and saw that the yard was full of youngsters now, most of them barefoot, many of them wearing garments which indicated homes of extreme poverty. Many of them, he knew, had never seen a railroad. Few of them had ever seen a pavement. But that was because there was no railroad or pavement in the county to see; their eyes were sharp enough, plenty sharp enough to see him. So he ducked, curled upon the belfry floor and closed his eyes, trying to sleep.

Luckily he couldn't sleep. Luckily the devils danced on his nerves, and he opened his eyes, for, doing so, he was just in time to see the bell moving. It swayed, but did not ring.

In a panic he snatched the coat from the bell. Then it pealed tumultuously. It boomed against his eardrums. *Dong-dong-dong-dong!*

The children formed in line outside the schoolhouse door.

For a minute of agony Ringle was afraid that Ella Marsh might realize that she had pulled the rope two full strokes without getting a response from the bell. But evidently not, for nothing unusual happened. The children marched in and lessons began.

Gradually the murderer relaxed, and the anxious sweat cooled on his face. He waited there, trying to sleep, but couldn't. This bell, which next June would have tolled for the Norton-Marsh wedding, hung too ominously, too ponderously over his head.

It rang again at 10:45. This time it was the teacher summoning her charges from morning recess.

At noon she dismissed them for an hour. Ringle heard water being drawn from the well; later, peering cautiously, he saw children sitting about the grounds eating their lunch. Scraps from these lunches would later provide further rations for him.

Childish awe of day before yesterday's crime was quickly dissipating. Soon the play about the yard became normally boisterous. The older boys

invented a game in which, imitating a posse with rifles, they sought Clint Ringle. The youth chosen to impersonate Ringle was being roughly handled when Miss Marsh tolled the bell at one o'clock.

Presumably she reproved them for playing this game, for at the afternoon recess they did not play it. Instead they played "Andy Over." The boys stood on one side of the schoolhouse and the girls on the other. A boy threw a ball and shouted—

"Andy over the house!"

The ball sailed over the gable of the school to be scrambled for by the girls on the other side.

A girl tossed the ball back. And thus the ball sailed back and forth, over the house, throughout the period of play. Ringle, crouching in the belfry, could catch a fleeting glimpse of the ball every time it cleared the gable.

At last a girl threw it awkwardly, too far to the left. It struck a post of the belfry, dropped to the main roof and from there bounced back to the girls.

After that an acute fright assailed Ringle as he watched the ball sail back and forth. Suppose it were thrown directly into the belfry and remained there! If Ringle threw it out he would announce his presence. If not, some agile boy would climb to the belfry.

And therefore the devils danced more tormentingly than ever upon the nerves of Clint Ringle as he watched the ball curve back and forth over the roof. Time after time it came perilously close to the belfry.

At last, tossed again by an awkward girl, it struck the belfry railing and bounced against the bell itself. Only the semi-paralysis of terror kept Ringle from shrieking as the ball then dropped neatly into the belfry well, at his feet. There came a cry of dismay from juvenile throats below. But Ringle batted at the ball with his open palm, as a man might bat at a spider dancing before his eyes. The ball leaped out of the belfry. Childish dismay changed to elation as it bounced from roof to yard.

Ringle was crouched out of sight, the tension of the next minute almost bursting his veins. Had he batted so quickly that the children would assume an un-

assisted bounce of the rubber ball?

It was Miss Marsh, pulling the bell rope to summon her charges inside for lessons, who broke the tension. And this, again, well nigh exposed Ringle. He had forgotten the bell. Every sense was trained in a strain of tension upon the children's reaction to the recovery of the ball. Thus he was kneeling with his head very close to the base of the bell.

When the forty-pound bell tripped on its spindle and swung back by gravity, it might easily have banged against Ringle's head. He saw it barely in time and dodged, avoiding the blow by an inch. Then he sank limply to the floor and lay there, breathing heavily, more unnerved than at any time since the lightning had struck the black oak snag.

He scarcely moved for the next hour. At four o'clock Ella Marsh closed her school. Teacher and pupils trudged homeward.



WHEN night came Ringle breathed more easily. Tomorrow there would be no school. Nor Sunday, although there'd be a brief church session in the morning. But church worshipers wouldn't be throwing balls back and forth over the house. That dangerous game would no doubt be played again Monday, but by Monday Ringle would have fled.

He was tempted to go at once. He resisted, however, because he knew that each night of delay would make more certain the relaxing of local vigilance, his program of stealing from deserted farm to deserted farm less hazardous. He must stand pat in the belfry until Sunday midnight. That night he again gained the refuse can for scraps of food.

Returning to the belfry, he sought sleep in vain. The night dragged interminably, but finally Saturday dawned.

The day brought blazing heat. Ringle was not sorry, because it meant the drying of mud. Through the dragging hours of the day he waited, sitting with his back against a wall and with his legs outstretched under the bell. Only once, when two riders met at the hitch-rack and gossiped, did he spy out.

"They claim somebody slept in a haystack over by Pottersville last

night," one said.

"That so? Well, it wasn't Ringle, because Ab Harlin swears he seen Ringle down around Evening Shade, Arkansas. He—"

"Yeh? Ab's allers seein' things, and I doubt if he seen Ringle. One thing's certain, though—Ringle's had plenty time to git clean outa this county."

The riders passed on.

Saturday went by, and Saturday night.

Sunday dawned clear. The murderer made ready for the ordeal of church.

At ten o'clock the church bell rang deafeningly in Ringle's face. He sat with his back against the south wall of the belfry, so that the ponderous swinging cone would miss him at right angles. He stared at it sullenly for the full ten minutes that it boomed the call to weekly worship.

Soon the citizenry of the ridge began to arrive, some afoot, some on horseback, some in buggies. Ringle saw faces he knew well, all as solemn as Sunday and as stern as death.

When the bell stopped ringing an organ began playing in the room below. Ringle heard, too, hushed voices conferring on the steps and by the hitch-rack. Many a curse was heaped upon his own head.

At last every one trooped inside and the service began with a hymn. Then a prayer. At last the sermon, delivered with a roar of feeling that would have swept Ringle, and all murderers, into the blackest pits of hell. Ringle, cowering in the belfry, heard the text read from Numbers 35:16:

And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death.

There was a fervor in the amens echoing this preachment which left Ringle trembling with an ague of panic in the sun-baked belfry.

There was another hymn. Then, just before the benediction, came an announcement from the pulpit.

"Brothers and sisters, at three o'clock this afternoon there will be—"

Some one in the congregation coughed, and Ringle failed to catch the final

phrases of the announcement.

Shortly the service ended and the people went to their homes.

Relief dripped in great globules of sweat from the murderer's features. This was his final ordeal, the last strain on his nerves and the last risk of detection. He exulted, assuring himself that his gauntlet was run. There'd be no more meetings downstairs. There'd be no more ringing of the bell. Nor would there be any loiterers about in case he chanced to jostle it himself.

There was a little water in his jug, a few crusts in his pocket. At midnight, rested and refreshed far beyond the usual fortune of fugitives, he could set forth through the dark woods. Fifty miles, taken by easy stages in three nights, would put him across two counties to the railroad at West Plains.

All he needed was sleep. And he believed now that, during this final sunny afternoon in the belfry, he could get it. He was feeling drowsy. He propped himself against the wall and tried to doze.

Only one thing cheated his sleep—a slight worry about what was to happen at three this afternoon. Was there, after all, to be another meeting here at the church? Uncertainty worried him, and he could not sleep.

Thus he remained awake until the angle of the sun told him it was around three o'clock. He looked out. No one was in sight. On three sides he could see only the post-oak forest; on the fourth side he could see only a poplar hedge. He waited another half hour. Still no human approached the churchhouse. Therefore the meeting which

had been announced for three o'clock must be in session somewhere else. It might even be in Gainesville. It was long past three now, so it need no longer worry him.

He made himself comfortable. He reclined with his back against the south wall of the belfry, his legs stretched beneath the bell. He closed his eyes.

But the afternoon sun now struck his left cheek, so he shifted, placing his back against the west wall. His face was now completely shaded from the sun. Then, long overdue for sleep, he dozed. The nap soon became sound slumber.

While Ringle slept in the belfry, a group met and adjourned at the home of the man he had murdered. Three o'clock was the funeral hour for Walter Norton; and at four his neighbors, in surreys and buggies, followed his body to the grave.

In the cemetery back of the poplar hedge a grave had already been prepared. As they made ready to lower the body of Norton into this grave, one mourner left the group and proceeded to the churchhouse. He entered to toll a knell in honor of the dead.

He pulled the rope—and a forty-pound cone of iron tipped from its spindle, crashing sharply against the skull of a sleeper!

The man who pulled the rope heard a cry of pain or surprise from the belfry. In a flash he understood, and then the bell clamored, not dolefully, but with swift and shrill alarms. Men came on the run; soon on all sides great, gaunt post-oaks, with crooked arms and gnarled knuckles, reached for the killer.





The LONG NIGHT

By ROBERT CARSE

ON THE dark horizon the moon was a pale flash of fire. Above it were two clear stars, seen through the black raggedness of wind torn cloud. The moon and those two stars gave the only light. The ship staggered thunderingly through deep darkness, the foam of her wash giving but a dim flicker of radiance.

As the ship rose, reeled and pitched onward, her sails beating like tremendous drums, the moon appeared to rise and fall in a twisting parabola of silver when seen against the yards, the trembling masts and canvas. In such a moment the ship was briefly a thing of spectral and unusual beauty, reaching up from the darkness of the sea across the pale moon fire to the great blackness of the sky.

Mr. Moire, the mate, was unappreciative of that beauty. He did not even seem to see it. He stood with one knee braced against the quarter bitts, looking intently aloft at her cloth; occasionally he looked aft and down at the man at the wheel, but that was all. Mr. Moire had just come up from supper to relieve the second mate. As that man had thumped below, Mr. Moire had thrust his head into the chart shelter and looked at the barometer there. It had perceptibly fallen while he had been below at supper. Standing here now, he

told himself that she was making herself up to blow—and blow like hell! Mr. Moire shifted his cud of leaf tobacco into the other cheek and spat down toward the boatskids. The spittle curved and cracked aft.

"Out o' th' nor' east," said Mr. Moire softly aloud. He laughed then, but at the moment he did not quite know why.

Light broke in a short shaft across the poop, and Mr. Moire looked that way. The captain was coming topside from supper. Mr. Moire shifted his cud back to the right cheek and stood utterly still. The captain came to stand beside him and also to look up, in silence. Behind them the man at the wheel grinned at the contrast the two men made.

The captain was tall, quite thin and lithe. He was dressed in a long watchcoat which came almost to his ankles and which bore upon its sleeves the four gold stripes and anchor of his rank and upon the shoulders stiff black and gold straps. He wore a peaked watchcap of the conventional type, carrying the gold oak leaves on the vizer and the device of his company upon the front of the band.

Mr. Moire had not shaved since they had dropped New Zealand astern. His broad and short figure was clad in a strong suit of Cape Anne oilskins. He wore a yellow sou'wester hat which had

once been spattered with red lead. His heavy legs were protected to the thighs by a pair of leather seaboots, handmade and costly, cleverly patched. They were of the type still worn occasionally by some of the Finnish sailors who serve in sail. When the captain first came aboard in Port Lincoln, he had been envious of Mr. Moire's seaboots; he had never seen a pair like them before. One day at dinner he had mentioned them to the mate, and Mr. Moire had been surprised. He had thought nothing of them, except that they were comfortable and kept him dry. Mr. Moire had never shipped in anything except sail.

The captain, as he came topside, had started to fill his pipe. He held a thumb over the loose tobacco in the bowl now, and lifted the hand in a brief gesture.

"She's beginning to make up," he said.

"Aye," said Mr. Moire.

"What is she logging now?"

"About twenty-four point seven, since two bells, five o'clock."

The captain finished filling his pipe and cleverly lighted it. Mr. Moire watched his face in the bluish sputter of the match. The captain was smiling as he spoke:

"We've brought no landfall, but I got a radio bearing while I was below. I figure now we'll make Ambrose Lightship by four bells."

"Tomorrow morning?"

"Yes," he answered, speaking quite slowly, "tomorrow morning. I aim to be alongside, with everything brailed in, by four o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

Mr. Moire crossed his arms another way and looked at one of the two stars to northward; it was not clear now, but blurred by a haze the color of live steam.

"That will be pushing her hard as hell."

The captain nodded.

"I plan to push her hard. Eighty-one days—Port Lincoln, Australia, to New York—that's what I want. That and dinner ashore tomorrow night with my wife. First wedding anniversary." The captain kept his eyes upon the face of his mate while he spoke, as if openly eager to watch that man's reaction to his words. "She's come out from Liverpool just for it. I think I can fix it up

with the company so I can take her back with me in the new ship. She's a sentimental kid; likes all that sort of thing. Really not the kind for a sailor's wife."

"Aye," said Mr. Moire.

The captain's rubber boots creaked on the spray-slapped deck. He came a bit nearer to Mr. Moire.

"Aye, what?" There was a distinct and sudden note of sharpness in his voice now.

"Aye," repeated Mr. Moire, his bearded and dirty looking face turned slowly to the captain's. "And this here is coming up into what a man might call a full gale."

The mate spoke as if at a signal. In the same moment the first great gust of the storm came leaping down upon the ship. There was the thrash of gear and canvas, the whimper of steel wire and rope; she heeled up, sidewise and then back, her shrouds clanging, sparks crackling blue from the blocks aloft, and then the water eased from her and went with a throaty, bubbling rush out through the relieving ports.

"Hey, you—th' watch!" Mr. Moire yelled with one hand raised to his mouth. "Hey! Stand alive!" But then, cursing, he was at the ladder and down it.

The captain could dimly see his broad form disappearing into the lightless dark of the waist. He almost smiled. He looked sharply at the wheelsman.

"How are you, there?"

The man blew sweat drops from his upper lip—

"Half a point off, sir."

"Hold her up, then! That's no wheelbarrow you got there."

"No, sir. Hold her up, sir."

The captain was quite certain the man cursed him under his breath then, and he started aft to make sure, but quickly stopped and swung around. Forward, by the pallid light of the guttering moon, he could see that Mr. Moire and the watch were taking the foretopgallantsail off her. The captain nodded to himself and knocked out the warm dottle of his pipe against one of the bitt heads. He didn't want, he thought, rather slowly, a pipe in his hands when Mr. Moire came aft again.



MR. MOIRE came aft pulling on his red woolen mittens, for he had been aloft with the watch getting in the sail. As he neared the captain he spoke in a confident and quiet voice—

"I think we'd better have the rest of them off her, everything but the fore courses and the spanker."

"Yes?" asked the captain, unconsciously imitating Mr. Moire's dialogue form in the preceding conversation.

"Aye," answered the mate, squinting down into the briny binnacle at the compass card. "That ain't storm cloth we got rigged there; she'll blow clean out o' the bolt ropes, we leave it there much longer. I was thinkin', comin'—"

"You think too much," said the captain distinctly. "Now lay for'd and have them brace her around; we keep on as she goes, with what she's got on now."

Mr. Moire moved his mittened hands, then his feet. He seemed to be upon the point of speech. But he remained silent, although cords stood sharply out on his brown throat, and deep lines dragged back from the corners of his mouth. His eyes were not upon the captain; they were forward and aloft upon the ship. What he calls his ship, thought the captain, not smiling.

The captain kept his eyes upon Mr. Moire. The captain was a man of some refinement and keen susceptibilities. It was his certain belief now that his mate was on the point of open rebellion. And although he could not state why, the captain welcomed such knowledge. The thing had dragged out too long now, that was it. Moire had resented his presence in this ship ever since he had come aboard her as the new master in Port Lincoln.

Moire had been acting captain then, after the death of the old man, Captain Pedersen, who had held her for twenty-one years. Moire had looked forward rather logically to having her as his own. He had been Pedersen's mate for ten years. But Moire had been forced to wait—while he came along and took over, just for this one trip.

That had been the first thing he had told Moire in Port Lincoln: He was only going to make the one trip, take

her home. Fever had got him on the way out East in his own freighter, and he had left her in Auckland to go in sickbay, with the dull prospect of going home as passenger in some big mail packet. But then the company's agent had stopped by the sickbay and told him that the only sailer the line owned, this one here, was loading wheat in Port Lincoln for Falmouth.

The rest, of course, had been quite natural; Pedersen's death, a chance to go around the Horn in Winter in a well found, full rigged ship, his own desire to command for once in sail, and his training in sail in the schoolship as a cadet. So he had asked the agent to cable Sommers, the old senior V-P. in London, and Sommers had cabled back that she was his to bring home.

And it had all gone well, except for that one sharp brute of a squall coming into Le Maire Strait and the Horn, when he had been cracking too much on her, and he had sprung the wooden foretopmast just above the hounds. It had still carried, though, and he had brought her roaring through and headed her right up on her northing. Then, ten days out of the Horn, he had got the wireless relayed from Sommers, telling him to put into New York instead of Falmouth. The line had just bought a new ten-thousand-ton oil-burning freighter dirt cheap in New York, and he was to get her. The crew was already aboard, outfitting her under the mates. He was to transship the grain from this one and take it on to England as his first cargo. Then Moire was to get this one and have her as his own—his ship. As his own, he would run her out to the guano islands, and be gone at least two years on that unsavory voyage.

All those facts had been in Sommers's radio, or could be accurately surmised from it. He had passed them on immediately and fully to Moire. To his surprise, Moire had shown only a small amount of elation, nowhere near what he would have expected from the man. Moire loved this ship, it seemed, and was unwilling to sail in steam. But he did not, the captain was forced to believe, like the idea of not getting home to England, or of sailing direct from New York to the Chilean guano

grounds.

At the time, the captain recalled now, he had been more than a little angered and disturbed by his mate's attitude. He had gotten over it though, through his personal elation in his own new good fortune, the fine command which awaited him, and the response to his wireless that his wife would be meeting him in New York for their anniversary.

From then on he had rammed this ship home, given her all she would take. He had spent hours with his charts and sights. He could and would do it in eighty days. He'd show this man, Moire, that he could handle sail as well as steam, and he would show them in New York and London too. Now there was this snorter of a gale. But wind made knots, and knots were what he wanted.

"You heard me, Mister Mate?" he asked in his strong, clear voice.

"Aye. I did."

The captain could not clearly see Mr. Moire's face, but he was sure that there was a dark mottle of color there in the heavy cheeks.

"But I am no' sure that you heard me," added Mr. Moire.

"Get for'd!" It was direct and flat command.

"You'll wait a moment," suggested Mr. Moire, "and you'll listen to me. You're skipper here—but only for this one v'yage. When you go down the dock she's mine. You're tearing her to hell and gone now, just for a silly record to please yer vanity. And—I forgot—to meet yer wife. For yer first weddin' anniv-er-sary. You've sprung this one's main stick now. I'm being frank with you. And if you keep this press o' cloth on her you'll snap her bad. Cap'n Pedersen kept her well for twenty-one years. And I helped him for ten. In one v'yage you'll all but wreck her. She's the only sailer in the company, and an old one. No good—no money in her. Guano. Australian wheat. All the slow, bad paying cargoes. And no money for repairs. That's all!"

Mr. Moire spat with the wind, watched it whip into the tremulous darkness. The captain laughed, and took his hands from the upper pockets of his watchcoat.

"Thanks," he said pleasantly, "for telling me. Now get for'd."

Mr. Moire stepped closer. He looked down, and the captain realized with an odd and quick shock that the man was looking at the four stripes of his rank upon his watchcoat sleeve.

"Ye're a master," said the mate. "I'd almost forgot."

Quite swiftly he went forward into the waist.



THE captain cursed, started to catch himself, and almost fell flat with the shock. Water lapped the poop, spanked hissing and cold against his face and body. He did not have to look up; he had heard the thrusting report. The maintopgallantsail had just blown violently from the bolt ropes. As Mr. Moire had said it would blow . . .

The captain stood, and hung with both hands to the quivering wetness of a spanker vang. He swung his head toward the wheelman. The sailor's face was the exact shade of frozen putty. His eyes were like marbles seen in fire-light. The captain swore at him, asking him if he needed another man to help handle her:

"All right, then. Keep her steady! Let her fall off two points. What you on now? Hold her there!"

The captain's eyes blinked in the wing of light from the quickly opened companion scuttle. Bjelman, the young second mate, skidded across the deck to the chart shelter, then from the shelter to the captain.

"Lay along," the captain yelled at him, "and tell Mr. Moire to keep only the forestays'l and the lower tops'ls on her!"

They both heard and ducked from the wave together. In its shock their heads met, and the captain bit almost all the way through his lower lip.

"Get for'd, you square-headed son!" he said thickly, spitting blood. "By gad, there isn't a sailor in the ship!"

From the poop he timed them at their job. They were surprisingly quick at it. He smiled. Moire and that lad, Bjelman, were both the same—crude, sullen. But if you did it in the right way . . . He stepped forward into the

trembling chart shelter and looked at the barometer. Still going down. He began to shake his head, in a long, side-wise motion which he seldom employed. Then he looked rapidly up.

Mr. Moire stood with his feet broadly spread at the after side of the shelter. The rays of the hurricane lamp within slid across him. He was soaked from head to foot; brine streamed from his hair and body. It had already formed into ice about the hem of his short oil-skin coat. Blood was mixed with that brine on the mate's face. Where a steel buntline end had cracked back and hit him, out on the yard, thought the captain.

"Well," he said aloud.

Mr. Moire lifted blue fingers to the cut on his forehead.

"One o' the young lads got it—a buntline end full across the face. He was passing a gasket. Knocked him almost out. Bjalman was the next man in-board. The lad reached fer him. They fell—"

The captain said nothing; in that moment he could find no words. When the mate again spoke the words seemed to the captain to come from far away.

"The lad fell clear. Gone. Bjalman hit the shrouds and bounced back. He broke both legs. Cook's got him in the galley, now. You hear me—Mister?"

"Yes."

"Your maintopm'st's going. Sprung bad now, and all the standin' gear. Should be under bare poles. Should—"

"That's enough," said the captain. "I'll handle this ship."

"No," said Mr. Moire, "it ain't enough."

Speaking, he came forward a pace, his right hand swinging to strike. The arc of the blow never came within feet of the captain. Beneath them, in a great, sharp and sickening movement, the ship spun and then fell trembling on her starboard beam. Mr. Moire's head hit the chart shelter side and he lay unconscious.

Water rushed the deck incessantly. It glanced its black and cold embrace about him as the captain tried to stagger erect up the slanting deck.

He slid and fell four times before he could get himself and Mr. Moire up.

Then, the mate struggling and mumbling weakly in his arms, he pushed his way to the open deck and looked forward. The wooden maintopmast had gone, taking with it the royal yard and almost all the yards and gear on that mast. The captain was not sure. The ship lay on what was at least a thirty-degree list. She stayed that way. Seas higher than any ship fell constantly upon her, but she only struggled with sluggish slowness against them, their recoiling crests beating upon her with malevolence which seemed almost human.

Mr. Moire swore coherently, and the captain released his grip. The mate spoke without looking up more than once.

"Shifting boards have gone in the holds. If we can get out there and clear that fouled gear from her, she may come back. But she won't last long, she won't, not more than twenty minutes!"

The captain said nothing directly to that. He went aft, and found the wheelsman unconscious and a good bit more than half dead, jammed by a wave up against the taffrail. The captain fished him out, pummeled most of the water from his lungs, lashed him fast about a chart shelter handrail, lashed the wheel, then went forward.

When he came back Mr. Moire was still there in the same position, gripping the chart shelter side, his eyes on the fore part of the ship. Mr. Moire listened for a moment to the sounds of axes from forward, brought to them here through the rushing clamor of the wind and the sea.

"Two went," said the captain very clearly. "The cook and that young ordinary, the Australian kid. I've turned the rest to, chopping her clear. I've sounded two tanks. She's still dry and sound below. But the shifting boards have gone. We'll have to get that damn wheat back. Then she'll come right and we'll shove her home." He swung his head in a sidelong glance at Mr. Moire. "I've never lost a ship yet, Mister, and I'm not going to start with this one now."

The captain smiled, a conscious effort, but in it were confidence and returning strength. He pointed at the wheelsman, fumbling now at the lash-

ings which held him.

"Take that man and four more. Break out some shovels and some of those planks in the dunnage in the after lazaret. You can get into the holds from that door in the cuddy, through the pantry, below here."

"No," said Mr. Moire. He repeated it.

In the bluish glimmer of the hurricane lamp the captain looked at the skinned knuckles of his right hand. He looked at his mate.

"Oa your way, Mister."

"No," Mr. Moire spoke without hesitancy. "I take no sailor down there with me. She's going, and she's going soon. Lose her, you said? Mister, I damn well saved her for you before, down off the Cape, an' I tried to save her here, now. You—" Mr. Moire caught himself with visible effort. One of his mittened hands jerked forward in a short effort. "Look at her! I lead none of them lads below. They can die in the boats, but not trapped down there. They've taken a lot now—"

Mr. Moire was moving slowly forward, in the direction of the ladder head. The captain caught him by the shoulder; Mr. Moire was dully surprised that the captain possessed so much strength.

"Listen, you!" said the captain in a voice that was no longer clear. "Stand by and listen to me, you lunk! I can get another ship. This rat-chewed hooker means nothing to me but a way of getting home. I thought she meant a lot to you. I thought you—hell, you couldn't get another ship! The company would ship you out as a bosun in steam! If you're half the man you think you are, you'd go down there and drive every hand in the ship before you! If you weren't a lousy yellowback!"

The captain had stepped forward a pace as he spoke, one hand clenched and beginning tentatively to rise.

"And you stand and talk of abandoning!" He smiled with those words. "You—who say you like this packet!"

Then he saw Mr. Moire's face and eyes, the sloping motion of his off shoulder, and he whipped back his fist to strike. But Mr. Moire struck first, and he did not smile as the captain sagged past him, grunting in his throat.

The captain shook sea water from his

eyes, spat it from his mouth and lungs. Hands fumbled at his shoulders, and he looked up, dimly trying to find the owner of them. The lean and blue faced steward crouched beside him, his white jacket ballooned and slatted behind him in the wind.

"Crimey, sir!" he reiterated. "Wot a poke 'e 'it yer!"

The captain shook the hands clear. He was trying to get curses out through his torn lips. Then—

"Help me up, you!"

"Yes, sir!" The steward assisted the captain, and talked constantly, in a nervous release of his fear. "Been sea-goin' all me life. Never seen a myte strike a marster. Naoh. Mutiny, that's it, isn't it, sir? Got me as witness, sir. Just come fr'm below. Sort o' wetted down a bit, there; thort I'd better—"

"Stow that!"

The captain's voice slashed like a whip. His grip upon the white jacket all but lifted the man off his feet. He turned, dragging the other behind him—

"Dammit, you're one that's going with me, anyhow!"

The saloon lamp cast a murk of green light. Water which entered through a sprung storm port eddied, then gushed across the place. The captain dragged through it, the steward stumbling before him. At the door of the after lazaret he stopped and looked into the steward's bloodshot eyes.

"You and I," he said distinctly, "are going for'd, in the holds—to shovel grain. Try to right her. Understand me? That's why Moire hit me—one reason, anyhow. He thought it couldn't be done. Pick up those shovels and a couple of those planks!"

The steward made a kind of bird-like chirping sound behind his front teeth. He gasped the words:

"Beggin' yer pardon, sir, but you're not—you're not—barmy, sir?"

The captain stood by the cuddy door. He held a pry-bar in his hands; with it he was jamming loose the big steel dogs holding the door. The hurricane lantern, lashed about his waist, flickered up over the angles of his face. The steward saw that he was smiling, his lips drawn widely back.

"Maybe," he answered. "But who

cares?" The door had just clanged back before him. "Lay in there, you! You and me are going to fool Mr. Moire!"



MR. MOIRE brought the men aft to the quarter in a body. He was quite awhile in doing it, for they carried with them three of the men who had been injured and whom, Mr. Moire hoped somehow, they could take off safely with them in the one remaining boat. They hunkered in under the lee of the mainmast at his order, and he and the boatswain started up to begin work on the boat.

On the ladder Mr. Moire stopped to lean back and yell into the boatswain's face—

"You seen that stooard?"

"No! He must be aft, sar!"

"Stay here a minute then. I'll go get him. Him and that other guy. Murder's something else."

The boatswain shook his square head. "Purty bad, back t'ere, Mate."

But Mr. Moire was up the ladder then. A sea tripped him as he left the ladder head, and he landed up against the bitts, clung to them with the fierce strength of the knowledge of death right beside him. He was quite giddy when he got away from there. It took him a long time to work up the deck, past the wheel box and the binnacle to the companion scuttle, and always through water which flailed his head and body, gagged his throat, ripped at his eyes. The treads of the companion ladder seemed very dim before him, and he went down them unfeelingly, his head bowed against the reeling shock of the ship.

He was on his hands and knees when he came to the lashed door of the cuddy. He got to his feet, peering forward into the hold. It lay before him like a dark, weird cavern. Slowly, not yet fully understanding, he went on in, knowing only that some man must have gone here before him.

The hold was filled with an incessant stinging spray of dust and loose grain husks. The big shifting boards, built into the ship at Port Lincoln and running fore and aft along the keel line to keep the thousands of tons of loose grain

evenly stowed, had been smashed through in great gaps by the stress of the storm. Tons of grain had poured through those gaps; piled up against the lee side of the ship, mounting against the deck heads, adding terribly to the already serious list caused by the smashed masts and deck gear.

The captain stood on the leeward side, at the fore end of the hold. He was locked waist deep in the wet and stinking grain. He had lashed his lantern to a strong-back beam, and it was by that light Mr. Moire could see him and the steward. Both of them were working with slowly delivered blows of their shovels at the grain, tossing it back over their shoulders through a gap in the shifting boards and to its rightful place.

For just an instant, standing there, Mr. Moire's brain cleared, so that he could understand every detail of the efforts of these two men in front of him. Mr. Moire had never been forced to make the decision before, did not now know whether to laugh or curse at that attempt, pitiful, strange, and to him in this moment at least, insane. But he went on, crawling for most of the way on his hands and knees.

The captain did not see Mr. Moire until he came very close, clinging to the smashed side of the shifting boards.

"Come on, you!" yelled Mr. Moire. "You can do her little or no good like that! We're abandoning! Get out o' this trap while you can!"

The captain flung another shovelful of wet grain back over his shoulder before he spoke, and then Mr. Moire could barely catch the words:

"Get topside then, if you think that. You're a yellow swab, like all your kind! Hear that? All right, lay topside!"

He went back to his shoveling, bent far over the tool, his head turned from Mr. Moire's gaze. Mr. Moire came closer to him, attempted to take him by the shoulder. The captain wheeled at once, the shovel high.

"Let me be, or you'll have this!"

"Aye," muttered Mr. Moire. He edged away, closer to the steward. "How about you, Ducky?" he called hoarsely. "You loco too?"

The steward did not look at him directly. When his head turned with his

body as he swung his shovel back, his eyes were all but shut, as if he did not want to see Mr. Moire, or recognize his presence here. Moire cursed him.

"Stay here then, you loon!"

Then he started aft, toward the cuddy and the deck.

Mr. Moire found the boatswain and the men huddled in the chart shelter, numb and silent. He dragged the boatswain by the arm. The man croaked—

"I yust comin' down lookin' ver you, Mistar."

"Aye?"

The boatswain ducked his dripping head in a nod toward the boat.

"Waves knockin' hell outda her, Mate. Stave her in purty damn soon. T'en ve have nuttin'. You find t'em two fellars; t'ey comin'?"

"No," said Mr. Moire. His eyes shone in the misty darkness. "They're going to stay."

"All ride." The boatswain made a shrugging motion. "Mebbe couldn't get all hands in t'at boat, anyhow. Botta vurk easy, puttin' her oversi—"

"To flaming hell an' gone with that boat!" said Mr. Moire. His fingers bit at the boatswain's shoulder until the man barked with pain. "Th' skipper's down in the hold with that barmy stooard. They're working at shiftn' back th' grain. You hear that? You savvy? And we're going down and work with them. Savvy that, too!"

The boatswain was a Dane, a man of slow reflexes; his mouth gaped open and he made clucking noises in the vicinity of his palate. But he also knew Mr. Moire, and he could see the glitter of the mate's eyes, like sunlight on polished steel.

"Aye, aye, sar," he said thickly.



FOR the first hour or so they were there together in the hold the captain and the steward seemed to ignore the presence of Mr. Moire, the boatswain and the hands. They worked side by side and in a long line all up and down the hold, on both sides of the captain and his companion. They all toiled at the same common labor, and now theirs were the same common hazard and goal. But, near the end of that first hour, the stew-

ard folded up at the knees like an odd wooden toy and tumbled headmost into the sodden grain. Mr. Moire shook him, chafed his wrists. Finally he propped his head and poured through the slack, blue lips brandy from a metal flask he had been keeping in an inner pocket. As he stoppered the flask he looked up, right into the captain's eyes.

"It's good," he said instantly. "Ye'd like a sup? Helps a lad's shovel along—"

The captain drank in silence, and in silence gave the flask back. Mr. Moire took it so, only lifting one hand from his shovel haft to receive it, although, as he went on working, his lips formed and pursed over the thin, unheard notes of a whistle.

They kept no record of those hours they worked there. They had no way of telling, and did not care. They fought the sea, they fought for the ship, together, stroke for stroke, moment for moment, and that was all. They worked in a trance of weariness in which not even their pain was clear. Grain was in their hair, clotted thickly on their sweating faces and half nude bodies. They stooped far over, never coming really upright, making no other movements except the forward thrust and backward slash of the shovels. They did not sing, or speak; they had no words.

And, slow degree by broken degree, they won. Gradually they raised that correcting level of the grain; almost imperceptibly the ship slipped back, losing her list, righting herself. They were evening her, balancing her all but square. They built new shifting boards with clumsy, slow blows. But they laughed a little as they hammered those in place, for they knew now that they had lived through the night; they and the ship had lived . . .

The storm fell toward noon. Since nine o'clock in the morning watch some of them had been on deck working at the wrecked gear. The sun had just come upon the sea. Waves which had run deep gray-green and menacing turned a bright but soft blue. The sunlight poured as if through a funnel. It seemed to burn back the clouds, firing their edges with scarlet and with gold. The decks of the ship smoked. Gulls circled the ship, screaming hoarsely.

One or two of the younger men yelled back at the gulls, their salt-cracked lips opened wide.

The captain finished his sight and lowered his sextant. He totaled the figures on a sodden piece of paper. He shook his head sidewise in a long motion.

"Six hours more and we'd been abreast of Bermuda. A long night . . ."

He stepped from the chart shelter and gave the course to the man who had been sent aft to take the wheel. Then he looked forward.

Mr. Moire had just finished sending up the new jury maintopmast, rigging the truss and tye. The cloth of the newly set headsails clouded white in the brilliant sunlight. Mr. Moire had turned to give one more order to the boatswain and the sailmaker. Now he was walking aft. The captain awaited him, nursing his jaw with fingers he had again forgotten were raw to the bone.

Mr. Moire inclined his head as he came up the ladder from the waist; the two men had not seen each other on the same deck since they had come up from the hold. Gravely the captain

nodded back. Mr. Moire swung around and looked forward as the captain gazed.

"That'll hold her, I guess," said Mr. Moire in a low voice.

"Yes," said the captain, "I guess it will."

Sharply aware of his own embarrassment and the restraint it put upon him, the captain looked at Mr. Moire, to find to his surprise that his mate was looking at him in exactly the same manner. But their gazes swung together, forward, on the ship. The ship was feeling the thrust of her canvas now; she lifted up into the long combers with eagerness and grace. To watch her eased some of the captain's embarrassment. He rubbed his fingers along his stubbled jaw. He looked at Mr. Moire.

"I'm glad she came through that last night," he said to the mate. "She's a nice ship."

"Aye." Mr. Moire was rolling himself a fresh cud of chewing tobacco. He stopped to nod. "Aye," he said again, and his glance met the captain's. "She's all right."



INDIGNANT AMERICAN MURDERS FAKIR

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE sons of Mother India are careless, I hold, downright careless! They are ganglion-scramblers, jitter-inducers, promoters of the heebie-jeebies. I know that I shall never be the same again. And my heart bleeds when I think of the thousands of poor innocents who go charging ashore in Indian ports, fresh from their cruise boats. It is only their splendid American sanity that saves them—plus the fact that by the time they reach India they are so fed up with their fellow tourists that they are impervious to all outer stimuli.

But to explain. Sitting on the screened veranda of the Madras Hotel, having *chota hazri*—which resembles American breakfast only in that one eats it at the same hour of the morning—could suddenly feel air being breathed down the back of my neck. Turning, I saw the hotel's native butler smiling obsequiously.

"Would the sahib like to see in-*tee*-resting thing?" he asked. "Just now?"

"How much?" the sahib countered. The butler's smile faded.

"The sahib should not *al-low* such consid'rations to enter his mind. Is he

not rich?"

"That's perfectly correct, butler," I said. "The sahib is *not* rich!"

"But this is not expenses. This is cheap. In courtyard is old fakir, very famous man. He play flut', and many cobra dance. For ten small, ins'gnificant rupee he do this as speci'l favor to you. I go now and tell him you wish him to play at once."

And the butler moved swiftly to the door.

"Now wait a moment, butler," I checked him. "You're having delusions of grandeur. For *two* large, significant rupees I'll take a look at his show. And not an anna more!"

The butler shook his turbaned head mournfully, hesitated an instant and departed. A few moments later, I heard the wailing of an Indian flute. It was being tootled in a persistent minor—reminiscent, I regret to say, of the circus sideshows of my unregenerate youth. I finished the chickory coffee, pushed aside the mucilaginous marmalade and walked out to the courtyard.

Before a small basket an old bearded Indian squatted on his heels. Seeing me, he stretched out a skinny hand and raised the lid of the basket. A sharp gasp arose from a large group of Indian onlookers. Attracted by the show—for which I was paying—the entire native staff of the hotel had congregated in the court.

Immediately two cobras lifted inquiring heads to see what it was all about. Again the old man played upon the flute. Exacerbated by the sound, the cobras flattened their thoraces into hoods and began to sway. Then one of them started to leave the basket—for which act I could hardly blame it, with such a volume of noise directly in its ear. But the fakir poked it with his flute and it subsided.

Then, as if disapproving of all this nonsense, both snakes stopped weaving and flopped gloomily back in the basket. The old man gave the basket a poke with his bare toe and his tootling in-

creased two-fold. Up reared the cobras again, but they refused to weave. Instead, they decided to go places and see things. Before the fakir could stop them, they had caromed out of the nest and were slithering hither and yon in that courtyard.

Loud screams arose. The throng of native servants scattered with all the fine fervor of a covey of startled quail. Since I had been told by the butler that the snakes were harmless, their fangs drawn, I saw no need to bolt. Such an act, I felt, was not Nordic. But I had my misgivings. I had a flock of them!

The larger of the two reptiles, frightened by all the rushing about and the blether, decided that it wanted company. Mine. Before I could say more than "Whu-whu-whu-what!" it had begun to climb my leg.

I looked at the fakir and I abruptly noted that his eyes had glazed with what seemed to me to be sheer fright. Both of his hands went out in a pantomime indicating that I was not to move a muscle. The advice wasn't needed; I had no ability to move.

He skipped toward me, his motions extraordinarily swift for a man of his years, caught the cobra by the back of its neck and bore the reptile to its basket. As he did so, he muttered something in the Madrassi dialect.

Again I felt a hot breath on the back of my ears. Behind me was the butler, his dark face blanched to a sticky ocher.

"That old man is very careless," the butler said jerkily. "Never again will I *al*-low him to dance his snake in hotel courtyard. Just now he say that for a year he forget to take out snake poison from cobra mouth. If you don't take out every year, poison grow back. He was little afraid snake would kill you."

I turned on the butler.

"Oh, he was a little afraid, was he? He forgot that small matter of taking out the poison, did he? He—he—he—Hell and damnation, butler, get me a whisky-soda, and get it quick!"

Continuing

The GHOST RIDERS

By W. C. TUTTLE



The Story Thus Far:

OLD Dan Shiel died the day before his son, Don, came back to the Lazy Moon Valley from the penitentiary. Old Dan had in his body the bullets of Parke Deal and Buck Halstead, Quarter Circle E riders; and young Don had a record of three years in prison because Deal and Halstead swore they had come upon Don and his old dad running their brand on Quarter Circle E horses.

Don found his Lazy S ranch swept almost clean of stock by rustlers, and mortgaged to Frank Eldon, the banker, for ten thousand dollars. Nobody on the ranch had ever seen any of the money. He also found that Clare, the pretty daughter of Jim Edwards, owner of the Quarter Circle E ranch, was about to be married to John Eldon, son of the banker.

Old Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson, ancient cowboys and friends of his father, told Don that Buck Halstead had been dragged to death by a horse a short time after his conviction; and that Parke Deal, Halstead's partner in the false accusation of Don, had mysteriously come into a lot of money and was now owner of the Bar D ranch.

A few nights after Don's return, Teddy MacRae, a Quarter Circle E rider, was shot, and twelve head of horses stolen from the ranch corral by three rustlers, disguised by white robes and

masks. Parke Deal intimated in several quarters that he believed the ghost riders to be Hopeful Harris and Spud Gilson, led by Don Shiel. When Clare Edwards heard of the accusation, she refused to permit her father to invite Deal to her wedding.

The night Clare was to be married to John Eldon, she suddenly decided that she could not go through with the ceremony. But before the guests, already assembled, could be told, Silver Linin' Smith, the deputy sheriff of Del Sur, staggered into the ranch. His clothing was torn and he had a big welt on the side of his head.

"John Eldon is dead!" he gasped. "The ghosts got him!"

AFTER a big drink of whisky Silver Linin' pronounced himself as being able to lead them to the smashed buggy. There was no barbecue that night, and after everybody had gone Jim Edwards watched the candles in the lanterns sicker and die out. They found John Eldon in the washout, and the doctor said he had died instantly.

"Buckshot," he told them. "Both

barrels at close range."

Silver Linin' shuddered.

"And them guns scattered pretty bad. Golly, I shore got out of that by the skin of my teeth. I started out to be best man, but I ended up by bein' the luckiest jigger on earth to escape thataway."

Down at the office Rowdy made the deputy sit down and tell every detail of it over again. But the story was the same.

"Oh, I seen all three of them white figures on horseback, Rowdy. We was into 'em awful quick. The one in the lead fired the shot. I dunno which way they went. I was too busy hangin' on."

"But why would anybody kill John Eldon?"

"I dunno. I tell you, Rowdy, he was worried about Don Shiel."

"Keep that to yourself. Don Shiel wouldn't kill him. There's got to be a reason, you know."

"At least, there ort to be, Rowdy. Well, I can tell you two. One was to prevent John from gittin' married, and the other one was that whoever fired that shot thought I was drivin'."

"Thought you was drivin'? Does somebody want to kill you?"

"If I thought they did I'd start runnin' away right now."

"You don't need to worry."

"Why not, Rowdy?"

"You never had energy enough to make anybody mad at you."

Don Shiel came to Del Sur the next day and walked into the Lazy Moon Saloon, where several men were talking about the murder. It was Sunday, and word of the murder brought many folks to town. Old Frank Eldon, half crazed over the tragedy, saw Don enter the saloon and followed him.

The conversation ceased as Don came in, and he felt that his presence had something to do with it. He turned his head and saw Frank Eldon, his seamed old face contorted with bitterness. The old man started to speak, but merely became incoherent.

"What's wrong with you, Eldon?" asked Don.

The old man choked, unable to speak.

Don's eyes swept the crowd.

"Does anybody know what is wrong with him?" he asked.

"You ask that?" The old man fairly screamed, as a man reached out and grasped his arm. "Let me go! Damn you, let lose of me. Shiel, you came back here for a purpose, you—your horsethief! You didn't want my John to marry her. Oh, I know you, Shiel!"

The old man's voice broke and he tried to loosen the hold on his arm. At that moment the sheriff came in.

"Has Eldon lost his mind?" asked Don.

"Lost his son," said a cowboy.

"Act it easy, Frank," advised the sheriff. "No use actin' like this."

"No use? And my son ready for the grave?"

"What's he sayin', Rowdy?" asked Don calmly.

"John is dead," said the sheriff softly.

"He was murdered on his way to the weddin' last night."

"You don't need to tell him," choked Eldon.

Don's face paled, and his eyes narrowed.

"And I'm accused of it, eh?"

"Not accused, Don."

"Suspected."

"Well, I can't help what folks think."

"Yes, and I'll get you," threatened Eldon. "I'll get the best detectives in the world and I'll send John's murderer to the gallows."

Don's eyes swept the crowd, came back to the sheriff and Eldon.

"It looks as though you all suspect me," he said evenly. "Well, do you want to try and take me?"

"Don't be a fool, Don," replied the sheriff. "Nobody's accusin' you. Don't pay any attention to Eldon; he's all het up and blowin' off."

"I'm not," wailed the old man. "Shiel hated John because John was going to marry Clare Edwards. Shiel came back to get her. Shiel hated me because I hold a mortgage on his ranch. Oh, I know what I'm talking about."

Don laughed harshly and slowly backed against the wall. The men all watched him tensely. They knew Don was not easily frightened, and they also knew he was fast with a gun.

"You're a mind reader, Eldon," he said. "I hated you. I didn't hate John. In fact, I didn't consider him worth hatin'. You imposed on a sick man when you took a mortgage on the Lazy S. You always was more or less of a Shylock. Gold always has been your god—always will be."

Eldon's lips twisted grotesquely, but no words came, and the sheriff led him outside. Don turned and looked over the crowd in the saloon.

"I'm not provin' any alibi," he said clearly, and walked out. He wanted to talk with the sheriff, and found him at the office.

"Did you manage to pacify the old man?" asked Don.

"Sent him home," replied the sheriff, staring down at his boots. He looked up at Don. "Shiel, if I was you I'd leave this valley."

Don smiled quizzically at Rowdy before he spoke.

"Why?"

"Don, I like you, and I've tried to play square with you, but I don't mind tellin' you that Frank Eldon's talk might be bad medicine for you. Folks are queer thataway."

"I reckon I get your meanin', Rowdy. Folks are queer—but so am I; and I'm stayin' right here in this valley."

"I knew you would," sighed Rowdy. "Yeah, I knowed you would."

Don walked back to the door, turned and laughed at the sheriff.

"And I'd just like to say that as long as there isn't any stronger evidence than mere suspicion, I don't scare worth a damn, Rowdy. And as long as I'm out of jail I can take care of myself."

Rowdy shrugged.

"All right, Don—after all, it's your funeral."

"Somebody's," corrected Don, laughing, and went back to his horse.

CHAPTER III

HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY

IT WAS about two weeks after the murder of John Eldon. Two cowboys came riding down an old trail, which led into Cottonwood Valley, across the range and about forty miles east of Del Sur. They rode in single file, backs straight, elbows bent, as their mounts jogged slowly along.

The one in the lead was tall and lean, with long legs and long arms. His face was long and bony, with a generous nose and a wide, thin lipped mouth above an aggressive chin. Beneath the brim of his wide sombrero was a pair of level gray eyes, nested deeply in grin wrinkles.

The other man was more stocky in build, with wide shoulders. His face was wide, blocky, deeply lined, and his blue eyes held the innocence of a youngster. His mouth was wide and seemed to be continually grinning at a serious world. Both men wore range garb—colorless shirts, overalls, short topped high heel boots, well worn Stetson sombreros.

Their cartridge belts were wide, hand made to fit every contour, and both carried holstered Colt guns. The taller one wore a scarlet handkerchief around his neck, while the other sported a blue one. These were the only spots of color about their apparel. There was nothing striking about their riding rigs or mounts. The tall one rode a tall roan, while the other bestrode a blaze faced buckskin.

"Unless that there map lied, we ought to be findin' Roulette," said the one in the rear.

The tall one seemed to come out of his reverie. He removed his hat and wiped his forehead with his forearm.

"Maps usually do lie," he replied slowly. "It always seemed to me that they measured country miles with a rubber tape."

"That's right, Hashknife. I shore hope they've got some tradin' stock down in this country, 'cause I'd like to trade off this buckskin. I ain't got no use for any

bronc that mistakes every house for his own home and wants to stay there."

The tall one laughed silently.

"Some city milkman ought to have him, Sleepy. He's one of the stoppin'est broncs I ever seen."

They rode along for another half mile, when the tall one suddenly jerked up his roan. Just ahead of them and across a little cañon two men had appeared around the point of a hill, and they were riding as if running a race. Down through the brush, across the swale, cutting across the trail, they were out of sight in a few moments.

"I'll bet on the roan," joked the short cowboy as they went on.

"He was jumpin' the highest, anyway. I wonder if that's the speed the natives travel around here. If it is, you'll shore have to trade off that buckskin, Sleepy."

And as if in reply, the buckskin went down in a lurching jump, and the rider went headlong into the brush. And at the same moment came the shattering report of a rifle. The tall cowboy whirled his horse in time to see one man on the point of the hill, dismounted and swinging his rifle for another shot, while another man was dismounting behind him.

The tall cowboy acted quickly. He went off his horse with a sidewise leap, while a bullet hummed over the spot he had just left. The startled roan leaped ahead, and the tall cowboy went sprawling behind a manzanita bush. Two more bullets splattered against the tough trunks of the manzanita, but the tall one was flattened, and they splintered over his head.

"Hashknife!" called his partner.

"Doin' right well, Sleepy," came the reply. "How are you comin'?"

"Remember the Alamo," chuckled Sleepy. "I'm *poco buena*, unless they git further up on the hill. Can you see 'em'?"

"I ain't lookin'. How are they actin'? Can you see?"

"Shore. Oh, they're holdin' a council now. If it was fifty yards closer I'd ruin the argument. They finished the buckskin."

"Dead, eh?"

"I'm usin' him for a fort. You stay where you are. If they start down, we can slide into thicker brush. What a lot of fun I could have, if I had a rifle. They didn't kill your horse, did they?"

"I ain't mournin' no horse enough to look," replied the tall one. "Please keep me advised, will you? I'm tired of diggin' my nose in the dirt."

"Why don'tcha lay on your back for a change?"

"M' nose is too long."

"They'd shorten it pretty cheap."

"Don't git personal. Watch the enemy."

"They're still debatin', and I—oh, oh! Scrooge down! They're mountin'. Ah-ha! They're scared, I tell you. They're goin' to circle us. Jist a min-ute, jist a—start slidin', Hashknife! Down thisaway. They're in the brush."

Hashknife slid quickly over the bank, and together the pair scuttled down into thicker brush. Hashknife's roan was a little farther down the trail, stopped in against a clump of mesquite. Quickly they separated, Sleepy remaining where he was, while Hashknife crawled parallel with the trail and came in close to the roan, where he crouched, gun in hand.

Everything was very quiet for at least ten minutes, and then a man came crawling along the trail, snaking his way along. He stopped where he could see the roan and took a breathing spell. Hashknife could have tossed his gun and hit the man.

Finally Hashknife shifted his eyes and saw another man snaking his way along above where Sleepy's horse had been killed. Apparently the other man could not see his companion, but seemed to have a fair idea of where he might be.

It was evident that the two men were satisfied that their quarry had not left by the trail, hence the man near the trail to block them from escaping that way. Hashknife saw the man sneak down near the dead horse, worming his way like a snake, lifting his head a little now and then.

"Plenty nerve," decided Hashknife. He felt sure that Sleepy would take care of that one, so he concentrated on the other.

Suddenly Sleepy's voice barked—

"Don't move, feller!"

The other man sprang to his feet, crouched.

"The same for you, pardner!" snapped Hashknife.

The man whirled, tensed, his eyes failing to see Hashknife. Then he did what any sensible man would have done—dropped his weapon and lifted both hands above his shoulders.

Hashknife's head came above the bush, and the man swore softly.

"How are you?" asked Hashknife conversationally, as he came forward and picked up the gun.

"Damn dumb," sighed his captive. "I told Hank that—well, damn him, he ain't no better 'n I am."

Sleepy was coming down the trail behind Hank, and Hank's hands were also in the air. Sleepy had a gun in each hand and a grin on his face.

"Collections are good," laughed Sleepy.

"I got a sheriff. What did you draw, Hashknife?"

"I'm his deputy," sighed Hashknife's captive.

"Pshaw!" grunted Hashknife. "I expected better than that. From the way you fellers was actin', I figured the least I'd git would be a governor or a secretary of war."



THE sheriff was eyeing the roan horse closely, and now he turned to Hashknife.

"Where'd you git that roan?"

"Got him originally from the Bar P outfit. Sold him to the YW and then bought him back again. He's all right, if you like roans."

The sheriff spat thoughtfully and turned to the deputy.

"Oscar, it 'pears t' me that we've made a mistake. Jist a hell of a mistake."

"That ain't goin' to set no precedent for you, Hank."

"Don't act comical, you danged fool."

"I'm tellin' the truth," replied Oscar stoutly. "If all your mistakes was tied end to end you could fly a kite with them plumb to the moon."

The sheriff ignored the statement.

"You boys ever been in Lodge Pole?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"Never heard of it before."

"Hell, you don't need to act like a lawyer to know they ain't the same two," said the deputy disgustedly. "Why don'tcha admit makin' one of your famous mistakes and apologize?"

"I'm goin' to do jist that, you sarcastic pup."

"See how he treats me?" The deputy weakly grinned. "Allus jumpin' on to me, the brute. Well, go ahead and apologize, Henny Weller. They won't never accept it—but go ahead and be a man among men."

"Those two fellers that went hellin' down the hill and across ahead of us—what have they done?" asked Hashknife.

"You seen 'em?" asked the sheriff anxiously.

"Sure. We thought they was runnin' a race."

"They was—with us," growled the deputy. "They stuck up a gamblin' house in Lodge Pole and gunned up a dealer. Hank went huntin' a cowboy on a roan horse. Haw—haw! Goin' out to kill the rider of any roan he could find."

"And killed my buckskin," added Sleepy sadly.

"He shot at the roan," said the deputy. "Hank's a fine shot. Probably had his eyes on the roan and his sights on the buckskin."

They went up and looked at the buckskin, which was quite dead.

"How far is it to Roulette?" asked Hashknife.

"Couple miles." And then to Sleepy, "My bronc will pack double, and I'll buy you a new horse in Roulette. Yes, I will, too. I'm responsible for the killin' of that bronc—and the county will have to pay for a new one. My name's Henry

Weller, and I'm sheriff of this county. That there ball-and-chain I'm draggin' around with me is named Oscar Reder. Oscar started out in life to be a man, but somebody burned his bridges ahead of him."

"I'm named Hartley," said Hashknife, "and my pardner's name is Stevens."

"Glad to have met you." The sheriff nodded.

"Under the circumstances it worked out all right," replied Hashknife dryly. "One of you shore drilled holes in the air which I had jist vacated."

"That was me," said Oscar proudly. "Shot a little high. I've been layin' off to fix the sights on that danged Winchester. Knowed it th'owed high at that range, and I should have allowed for it, but you was fallin' awful fast. Still, it's all right, I reckon."

"Yeah, it's all right with me," said Hashknife. "You got off pretty cheap yourself. When I yelped at you over there, and you jumped up and looked around, I dunno why I didn't kill you. It's the natural thing for me to do. I've allus done it, and I dunno why I didn't kill you. I reckon I'm gettin' tender hearted."

Hashknife said it so seriously that Oscar opened his eyes wide and shot a quick glance at the sheriff, who said—

"I reckon we might as well be rollin' on to Roulette, gents."

The town of Roulette was just what they expected. It consisted of one store, post office, two saloons, one of which was of two-story construction, the upper part being a sort of hotel. There were several old stables and corrals. In the rear of one saloon was a lunch counter, the only eating place in the town.

The sheriff and deputy seemed to know everybody in the place, which was natural, and the citizens looked upon Hashknife and Sleepy with a trifle of suspicion, until the sheriff and deputy vouched for them. There were several men playing poker in a saloon, and the sheriff called one of them outside.

"Jim, you got a good saddlehorse cheap?" he asked.

The man grinned, showing bad teeth in his unshaven face.

"I got a few, Hank. Ain't no world beaters, but fair ridin' stock."

"Cheap?"

"Cheap enough. Wait'll I cash in and I'll show you."

The sheriff introduced him as Jim Sherill, and they went down to a tumble-down corral, where there were a number of horses.

"Forty apiece to you, Hank," said Sherill, picking his teeth with a splinter off the top pole.

"That's all right. I owe Stevens a horse; so Stevens can do his own pickin'."

Sleepy was a good judge of horses, and his selection was a sorrel; one of the long haired, Roman nosed type.

"Best horse in the corral," said Sherill. "Four year old, and broke. He'll take you there and back. I'll write you out a bill of sale."

The transaction was completed quickly, and they went back to the saloon, where the sheriff explained why he owed Sleepy a horse. The men laughed over the incident. The robbery of the gambling house in Lodge Pole amused them more, and there was no sympathy for the gambler who had been shot.

"That damn tinhorn's had it comin'," declared one. "He prob'ly pulled a raw deal on a couple gents."

"Ain't no doubt of that," said the sheriff, "but the law don't allow you to settle things thataway. However, they got away, and the damn county has to buy a stranger a new bronc. Now buy a drink, 'cause I reckon they're on me."

"And the county'll pay for 'em." The deputy grinned.

Hashknife and Sleepy ate a meal at the lunch counter and announced their intentions of going south.

"Ride with us," invited the sheriff. "We're goin' back to Lodge Pole."

Hashknife had carried Sleepy's saddle in from the scene of the horse killing, and now Sleepy saddled the Circle JB sorrel,

which was a better animal than the buckskin had been.

The sheriff proved an interesting character, well acquainted with the county, and he regaled them with stories of that region.

"We've had our share of trouble around here," he said, "but it's gittin' tamer all the time. I got a letter from Rowdy Roberts, the sheriff of Del Sur—that's over across the range from here—and he said to watch out for stolen horses. Dangdest letter you ever read. Yes, sir, it shore amused me. It said somethin' about them havin' trouble with a lotta ghosts. Said them ghosts murdered a man. Can you imagine that?"

"Tough ghosts." Hashknife grinned. "Scared him to death?"

"No, sir, he said they shot him with a shotgun."

"Duck huntin' spirits, eh? Sounds interestin'. I never knowed a spook to use a scatter gun."

"Same here. All I've ever heard about spent their time rattlin' chains and groanin' to beat hell. These has improved on the species. My personal advice to them Lazy Moon jiggers would be cut down on their liquor. I've drunk that Del Sur whisky, and she shore has authority. But I never seen no ghosts. No, sir, I don't remember seein' anythin'."

"That sheriff was prob'ly kiddin' you," said Sleepy.

"Not Rowdy Roberts. No, sir. Oh, if I was talkin' to him, he might kid me—but not with a pen. It's too hard for him to write. He didn't say he'd seen them there ghosts with his own eyes, but he wrote jist like he believed in spooks."

"What sort of a range is this Lazy Moon Valley?" queried Hashknife.

"Pretty good. Jim Edwards owns the Quarter Circle E, and that's the biggest outfit. Nice feller, Jim is. Del Sur is the county seat. Folks down in Nash wanted the county seat, 'cause of them bein' on the railroad; but Del Sur outvoted 'em."

"Do we go through Nash?"

"Not necessarily, unless you go that direction. Straight south of Lodge Pole, on the main road, is Henderson. That's the shippin' point for this range. Nash is about ten, fifteen miles east. Stage runs from there to Del Sur, north. You boys better lay over in Lodge Pole tonight. She's quite a trip to Henderson, and there's nothin' between here and there."

"Lay over," advised the deputy. "Hank ain't had a victim for ages. He ain't told you half the things he can imagine about this country."

"Can you play pool?" asked Sleepy. It was his pet recreation.

"Can I what? Play pool? Brother, I was the jigger who showed old man Brunswick Balke how to put the cushions on a table. I played the first combination shot ever made in the West. Do I play pool?"

"We lay over." Hashknife grinned.



"NOW you jist git to hell off this place, and keep off, or I'll blow a hole in you that a camel could walk through."

Old Hopeful Harris fairly quivered with wrath as he stood on the porch of the Lazy S ranch-house, legs braced far apart, a Colt .45 in his right hand. Backing across the yard toward a saddled horse was Sidney Byers, the detective, who had been detailed on the case by Frank Eldon.

Byers was a big man, a cowboy in his earlier years, later a city detective. Now he was paunchy, jowled, red of face, rather mad. Behind the wrathful old cowboy was Spud Gilson, his ancient face wrinkled with amusement.

"If you turn around, he might shoot you in the back," warned Spud.

"You keep your beak out of this," said Hopeful. "I'll show him how he can come out here and try to worm somethin' out of me. Git on that horse, you—you ghost hunter. Git on and never come back."

"Oh, put down that gun," growled Byers, reaching for his reins.

"When I put it down, you won't see me doin' it. And lemme tell you somethin'

else, you hunk of leaf lard. Dig out your ears and listen real close to m' words of wisdom. If Don Shiel catches you out here ag'in, he'll sock you so hard that you'll have to lay on your belly to draw on your boots."

Byers mounted clumsily and rode away, perspiration dripping from his double chin. Hopeful dropped in a chair on the porch and puffed audibly.

"That there gun ain't loaded," said Spud informatively.

"Don't I know it? Hell, that's all that saved him. I tell you, I've killed men for lots less than that."

"Yeah, I know." Spud nodded seriously. "You allus killed on the least provocation. 'S a wonder to me your black conscience don't bother you at night."

"Well, anyway, I shore sent him away talkin' to himself. He'll tell old Eldon, and mebbe he'll have appy-plexy."

"Not if appy-plexy is a self-respectin' disease, he won't have it."

"Well, it's free—if you can catch it."

"Then he might have it."

Old Hopeful sighed and looked around.

"Well, I dunno how it'll all come out. I shore feel sorry for Don. We can't dig for that money in many more places without makin' this here rancho look like a minin' claim. You know, I never re'lized that Dan Shiel never had no papers nor nothin' to show any sales."

"He ain't sold nothin' for ages," reminded Spud.

"Yeah, that's true. But I tell you, we've been robbed. There ain't noways half as many cattle and horses as there should be. After 'while Don will ride in, set down here and stare at the sky. He won't find no Lazy S horses up on the mesa. Hell, there ain't none."

"Not none," agreed Spud. "Everybody's agin us, and no stock. But—" Spud grinned widely—"we're the only ones that ain't lookin' behind us in the dark for fear of ghosts."

"No, we don't scare easy. Well, it's time to mingle a few biscuits."

"Cut down on the sody, will you? I'm gittin' yaller."

"Huh! Gittin'! You allus was yaller. Don't blame the biscuits."



BYERS rode back to Del Sur filled with a great wrath. Rowdy and Silver Linin' had looked him over and decided that Eldon was wasting money on him.

"That jigger couldn't foller a load of timothy hay through six inches of fresh snow," decided the deputy. "And when he's gone we'll still have ghosts."

Byers was full of questions, and nearly distracted the sheriff, who answered to the best of his ability. Silver Linin' ignored him, but Byers did not seem to mind that. He told the bartender of the Lazy Moon Saloon that you couldn't expect much intelligence from a deputy sheriff, because if he had any brains he wouldn't be a deputy.

"And that settles a question that's been botherin' me for a long time," stated Silver Linin', after the bartender had told him. "I've been tryin' to decide which to favor—Byers or the ghosts. You might advise him to rattle his hocks out of this alley, before somebody hands him a windin' sheet and a membership in our ghost club."

"He was askin' me a lot of questions about what happened the night John got killed, and I asked him why in hell he didn't ask you. He said he did, but he thought you might be holdin' somethin' back."

"I have been," the deputy said grimly, "and when I let it loose, Mr. Byers is goin' to need a lotta new teeth."

Since John's death, Frank Eldon had aged greatly, grown more grim, if such a thing were possible; he ran the bank alone. He insisted that the detective report to him every day, and now he looked up anxiously as Byers came in.

"Well, I've been out to the Lazy S," said the detective, sinking into a chair.

"Yes? What results?"

"I nearly got my head shot off."

"Don Shiel?"

"No! Hopeful Harris."

"Hm-m-m-m-m! What right has he to

do a thing like that?"

Byers growled audibly.

"That's a damn sensible remark. As though it is possible to get a murder permit!"

"Well, did you learn anything?"

"Learned that I'm not wanted out there. You told me that those two old cowboys were—well, rather simple. Simple! Yes, they are—not! They hate you and they love Don Shiel. Fine chance for me to do anything."

"Don Shiel murdered my son," declared the old man, his bony wrists trembling on the desk top until his cuffs rattled a tattoo. "I know he did, Byers. It's your job to prove it."

"Pretty tough," sighed Byers. "Unless the ghosts ride again and give us a chance, we'll never get him. I can't talk with Shiel. He laughs at me. And those two old bow-legged pelicans are tough. They won't tell anything."

"Then you admit failure, eh?"

"No, I've never done that. But you demand a daily report, and I'm admitting that I'm no nearer an arrest than I was when I arrived."

Eldon laughed sarcastically.

"They said you had brains. Can't you frame him into a confession? Things like that are done."

"You've been reading stories." Byers laughed. "If there's any framing done—you do it. I took this job at a fixed salary, and if I can't get my man in a reasonable time, I'll quit."

"Five hundred a month and your expenses," moaned Eldon.

"That's right. And you better put in some of your time praying that I show results, because I'm afraid I won't."

"What did you find out about that shotgun?"

"The shotgun part of it is all right. Before Don Shiel was sent to the penitentiary he purchased a Winchester shotgun through a local store. The man isn't certain, but he thinks he ordered some buckshot shells for Don at that time.

"They have a shotgun at the Quarter Circle E. There are several more shot-

guns around the country. There is no proof that Shiel owns the shotgun which fired the shot. All shotguns will shoot buckshot. So all we've got is suspicion."

"Well, do your best," said Eldon. "I want that murderer hung."



BYERS went out to see Jim Edwards and had a long talk with the big cattleman.

Edwards did not voice any suspicion. Teddy MacRae was able to be about, and Byers talked with him about the three ghosts.

"Pretty clever idea," said Edwards. "Prevents identification and adds mystery."

"The thing to do is to find what three men work together," said Byers.

Edwards smiled grimly at the detective.

"Oh, I know that answer," said Byers quickly. "But Eldon ruined all chances when he openly accused Shiel. If things had been done right we might have found incriminating evidence. But Shiel and those two old cowboys are not fools. Edwards, I wonder if I might have a few words with your daughter."

"What about?"

"Just a few questions. I can't afford to overlook anything that will give me some sort of a lead to work on."

"If Clare's willin'—sure."

Clare was willing, and they met her in the living room. Byers regarded her with distinct approval as they were introduced.

"Silver Linin' was speaking about you yesterday," said Clare.

Byers colored quickly and cleared his throat raspingly.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Nice of him, I assure you. Miss Edwards, I merely wished to question you regarding John Eldon. Did he ever confide in you that he was afraid of any one doing him bodily injury?"

"No, he never mentioned any such a thing to me."

"I see. I thought perhaps he had. Now, I do not wish to be personal, but isn't it true that at one time you were en-

gaged to Don Shiel?"

"Not formally," she answered coldly.

"It was understood?"

"Between us—yes."

"You saw Don Shiel prior to the wedding night?"

"Yes, I saw him in Del Sur the day after he came back here."

"Did you mention the fact that you were going to get married?"

"No, I did not mention it."

"Thank you, Miss Edwards; that is all."

Edwards walked out with Byers.

"Eldon is pretty bitter, ain't he?" asked Edwards.

"Yes, he is. In fact, I believe he is the most vindictive man I have ever known. If that man ever had any of the milk of human kindness in his system, it curdled long ago. I suppose he was wrapped up in his son. He will never draw a satisfied breath until the man who killed him is dangling at the end of a rope."

"Yes, it was a terrible blow."

While Byers was at the Edwards ranch, Don Shiel rode into Del Sur and dismounted at the bank. Frank Eldon did not see him until Don was leaning across the counter. Don's eyes were as hard as flint and his voice fairly rasped as he spoke to the old banker.

"Eldon, your detective was out at my ranch this afternoon, and he came within an ace of being killed. I warn you to keep him away from my place. Understand this—there's a deadline between me and mine and you and yours. I'm tellin' you this, and I'll tell Byers as soon as I meet him. I don't believe he could find his own shadow on the snow on a moonlight night. Anyway, he's through as far as I'm concerned, and you tell him what I said."

Don turned on his heel and walked out, leaving Eldon gasping, spluttering to himself. Don met Silver Linin' on the street and asked him where Byers was.

"He went out to see Jim Edwards, Don. At least, that's where he said he was goin'."

Don thanked him and rode out toward

the Quarter Circle E. He had intended having a talk with Edwards, and this might be a good chance to see Byers. But Byers left the Edwards place and rode down across the hills to Parke Deal's ranch, where he had a talk with Deal. The conversation naturally drifted around to the murder, and Byers told of his meeting with Clare Edwards.

"She didn't bat an eye when I spoke about John Eldon," said the detective.

"She wouldn't." Deal smiled. "Clare Edwards has plenty nerve. But she doesn't like me, because of a remark I made about Shiel. She should have heard what Frank Eldon said about him."

He laughed, and grabbed at his hat when a gust of wind swept the yard. Thunderheads had piled up behind the west range and Deal considered them.

"Looks as though we were in for a wild night," he observed. "When the storm comes in from the west we usually get a great one. Might be a good night for the ghosts to ride again."

"That's right." Byers grinned thoughtfully. "And it's a case of catching 'em with the goods. No use hunting for clues and asking a lot of questions. I think—" looking critically at the sky—"I'll take a chance on getting wet tonight."

"You better take a slicker with you, Byers."

"Yes, it might be a good idea. I suppose I can borrow one at the livery stable. Well, I'll see you later."

"Good luck." Deal smiled, and the detective rode away toward town.



DON rode in boldly at the Quarter Circle E, and Jim Edwards came out to meet him. There was an utter lack of friendship between these two as they eyed each other.

"Byers here?" asked Don.

Edwards shook his head quickly.

"He left here awhile ago."

"I didn't meet him between here and Del Sur."

"Maybe he went over to Deal's place."

Don nodded.

"I wanted to tell him to keep away from my place, Edwards. I know everybody thinks that the three ghosts originated at the Lazy S and that Byers is tryin' to put the deadwood on us for Frank Eldon. Well, he won't, and you can bank on that. And I want it understood that I won't be responsible for what happens to him if he comes out there again. I own the Lazy S—until Eldon takes it on that mortgage—and I'm markin' a deadline."

"Pretty strong talk, Shiel," said Edwards coldly.

"I mean to make it strong, Edwards. My horses and cattle have been stolen, the old place plastered with a mortgage and the whole damn country ready to hang me for murder. Well, if I've got to fight for the right to live, I'll fight. I've still got two old fighters to back my play, and I'm openin' the fight with a warnin' to Eldon to keep his bloodhound off the Lazy S."

"Does that go for me and my outfit, Shiel?"

"If your mission is on a par with Byers's—yes."

"What are you scared of?"

Don's face flushed, but his eyes grew hard as he looked down at the rugged face of the big cattleman.

"You've got the wrong opinion, Edwards; I'm not scared. I always had an idea that you were a square shooter. I don't hold my prison sentence against you. Parke Deal and Buck Halstead sent me over. They were hired by you, and of course you backed their play. That's all right. It was all in the game. But I'm not a convict now. My pardon was unconditional. I paid the penalty of the law, but society, which your lawyer harped so much about, don't seem satisfied."

"Well, what have I to do about this, Don?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Then—"

"My old dad hasn't sold a horse or a steer for ages, and yet there are fewer head on my range than there was when

I left. In fact, I'll bet there ain't twenty-five per cent of what should be there."

"You're not accusin' the Quarter Circle E of stealin' your stock, are you?"

"I'm not accusin' anybody; I'm merely talkin' straight, Jim. Dad was helpless and somebody took advantage of him; but I'm not helpless. Your hired help framed me into the penitentiary and killed my father, and mebber your hired help—"

"Framed you?" Jim Edwards laughed shortly. "It seems to me that you confessed. Nobody forced you to make a confession."

"Didn't they?" Don spoke hoarsely. "I confessed under the worst torture in the world, but you didn't know it."

"Torture! There wasn't anybody—"

"Wasn't there? I saved my father from prison, didn't I?"

"You said he wasn't guilty."

"Neither of us were guilty, Edwards. I couldn't save myself; but by admitting something I never did, I saved him from prison. They were willing to take my word for his innocence as long as I took the blame myself."

Edwards looked steadily at Don for several moments and a smile crossed his lips.

"I heard that theory before, Don."

"You did?"

"Yeah—from Clare."

Don took a deep breath.

"Well, I—I'm sure she didn't know it."

"You never know what a woman knows—or thinks."

"I don't think you believe it, Edwards."

"Well, I have my own beliefs in the matter."

At that moment Clare came out on the porch and saw the two men. She did not hesitate, but came down quickly, walked past her father and shook hands with Don.

"I'm glad you came out, Don," she said. "Why, it seems almost like old times, doesn't it, dad?"

Edwards smiled grimly, but did not seem enthusiastic. The pause was rather embarrassing

"I didn't break in on something I

shouldn't hear, did I?" asked Clare quickly.

"No," Don smiled. "It wasn't that important."

"Won't you come in, Don?"

The two men exchanged quick glances, and Don shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Clare, but I've got to go back now."

"I'll tell Byers what you said, Don," said Edwards.

"I told Eldon, and he'll tell Byers—I hope."

Clare held out her hand to Don.

"You'll come again, Don?"

"I'm stayin' in the valley—and thank you, Clare."

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO DEL SUR

LISTEN, you doggone hell diver!" yelled Sleepy Stevens as a flash of lightning illuminated his streaming face; but a crash of thunder drowned out the rest of his remark.

Hashknife Hartley pulled his sombrero lower against the driving gale.

"Who's a hell diver?" he yelled back at Sleepy.

"You are, dang you! Startin' out for a ride like this when everybody said it was goin' to rain like hell in an hour or so. You don't know if we're still on the road to Del Sur."

"We're on a road."

The wind howled through the hills, driving a sheet of rain against which the horses slowed down, trying to swing around. The men were cold and drenched, with no idea how far they were from town. It was like traveling into a solid bank of black water.

Suddenly a particularly bright flash of lightning illuminated the country, and in the light Hashknife saw the outlines of some buildings at the right of the road. It was the Lazy S ranch. He spurred in close to Sleepy and, as the thunder died away, he yelled the information in his ear.

They found the gate and went in

blindly, but even in the dark the horses found shelter in what proved to be the stable wall. As far as they could see there were no lights, although it was not yet nine o'clock, and there was little possibility that the inhabitants were in bed. They tied the horses behind the stable, away from the wind, and went on a tour of investigation. There was no answer to their knocks on the doors; so they went back to the stable, only to find it padlocked.

"Well, I'm goin' to git under cover, if I have to smash a lock," declared Sleepy.

They started to circle the stable in the blackness, when something hit Sleepy in the chin and almost knocked him down. He went slipping around, grabbed it with both hands, and discovered that it was a ladder leading up to a hay hole in the loft. Carefully they climbed up and took stock of the situation with matches.

It was dry up there, and with plenty of dry hay. They threw down a generous quantity for the horses, went down and unsaddled, leaving the horses tied in against the rear of the stable out of the driving rain. Then they went back up to the loft with their war bags, where they changed to dry clothes in the dark and burrowed down in the warm hay, while the rain and wind howled past the old building.

"You don't suppose them gallopin' ghosts will bother us, do you?" asked Sleepy.

"I wouldn't suppose they'd be abroad tonight, Sleepy."

"I never heard of a crazy ghost—and one would shore have to be crazy to be out in a night like this. Ghosts!" Sleepy spat contemptuously. "Some drunken cowboy's imagination."

"Two sober cowboys," corrected Hashknife.

"All right—two crazy cowboys. I knew what would happen as soon as you got to talkin' with that stage driver. Why, even over at Lodge Pole, your cars stretched six inches when that sheriff told you about it. You can't no more ignore that and mind your own business

than a hound can ignore a runnin' rabbit. You went all around Nash, workin' your nose like a bloodhound, until you found some danged liar to tell you what was goin' on up in Lazy Moon Valley. What do we care? It's none of our business if ghosts want to play around. We ain't bein' paid to lay no spirits. There's plenty trouble to be found, without comin' out of our way to find it. Anyway, that's my impression."

"Know anythin' about ghosts, Sleepy?" asked Hashknife mildly.

"No, I don't."

"There you are; this will be a education to both of us."

"Might be the death of both of us."

"Well," drawled Hashknife, "at least that would be a novelty. I've figured out a lot of ways a man could die, but I never thought of him bein' bumped off by a spook."

"When spooks start rustlin' cattle, I'm goin' to git me a job drivin' a stage," grunted Sleepy. "It's bad enough to have haunted houses, but when spooks git to ridin' horses, rustlin' cattle and shootin' around with shotguns, me for a city."

"It'll take more than brone ridin' spooks to make me take to a city."

"I reckon that goes for me, too—" sleepily. "There ain't no satisfaction goin' around a tall building to see what's on the other side."

"We need hills ahead, cowboy; tall hills to ride over—and more hills that we ain't never seen over. Heaven must be a succession of hills."

"It'd have to be—to be heaven, pardner."

A queer pair, these wandering cowboys. Henry Hartley was the son of an itinerant range minister in Montana, and had started out early in life to make his own way in the world. Being of the range country, he naturally learned the cattle business, and at the age of sixteen was one of the best riders in that part of the country.

But Hartley was blessed, or cursed, with an itching foot. The other side of

the hills called to him, and he drifted from his home range, wandering southward, working here and there, gathering knowledge of every kind, always restless, his gray eyes looking ahead; looking at the hills and wondering what might be on the other side. Years after leaving his home range he drifted in on the Hashknife range, which gave him his nickname, and there he met Dave Stevens, nicknamed Sleepy, because he always seemed to be awake.

Sleepy was from Idaho, a top hand of the Hashknife outfit, grinning his way through the world and wondering if any other man ever wondered what was on the other side of the hills. He found that other man in Hartley, and together they drifted away. Some might have called them soldiers of fortune, but Sleepy declared they were cowpunchers of disaster. And that was more than partly true.

Fate seemed to play a queer part in their game. Hashknife had been born with an analytical brain. Any mystery was a challenge. In any other environment he might have been famous as a detective. But he was not a man hunter. The punishment of a criminal was of no interest to him. Psychology, his ability to connect small details, and what he was pleased to term "lucky hunches" had solved many range mysteries.

Fate threw them into troubled places, and Sleepy knew that a mere hint of mystery would draw Hashknife as a magnet draws iron filings. Sleepy did not stop to analyze anything. He followed Hashknife blindly, knowing that the time would always come when Hashknife would need him.

Their life had made them both confirmed fatalists. Death had struck at them so many times that they merely laughed and wondered what fate really had in store for them.

It was all in a day's work with them; a day's work without monetary gain. At times they accepted work from a cattlemen's association, but it was not to Hashknife's liking. He wanted to be his own boss; free to go or stay, under obli-

gations to no one; so that when the other side of the hill called them, they might go.



THE mere hint of a mystery in Lazy Moon Valley acted as a spur to Hashknife, and he had lost no time in getting all the information possible, which was little enough, until he had met the old stage driver of the Del Sur-Nash stage, who told all he knew—possibly more, as he was prone to imagine things.

It was barely daylight when Sleepy crawled out of the hay and brushed himself off. It had ceased raining and the sun would soon be over the eastern ridges. Sleepy stepped over to a wide crack in the wall and peered out. Hashknife sat up, dug a few wisps of foxtail from inside his collar and looked curiously at Sleepy.

"Whatcha see?" he asked.

"C'mere, will you?" grunted Sleepy softly.

Hashknife flung off the rest of the hay and came over to Sleepy.

"Glue your eye to that next crack," said Sleepy. "Somethin's goin' on out there."

Hashknife had a good view of part of a corral, the gate and one of the sheds beyond. Old Spud was hurrying from the corral toward the house. At first that was all Hashknife could see, but a closer inspection disclosed a huddled mass on the ground just inside the corral fence.

"Ain't that a man on the ground?" queried Hashknife,

"Looks like it to me."

They waited patiently to see what might happen next. In a few moments came Old Spud, Hopeful and Don Shiel. They halted just outside the corral fence, but too far away for the men in the loft to hear what was being said or to see their faces. The argument seemed to wax hot between the three men. Old Spud pointed toward the stable and seemed insistent on some point.

Don Shiel started toward the house, but Hopeful bowlegged quickly after him, caught him by the arm and gestured

violently with the other arm. Don nodded and went on, while old Spud hurried to the stable and came out leading a saddled horse.

Into the corral they went, lifted the body to the saddle, took a few turns of a lariat and hurried out, leading the horse, disappearing from the view of the two men in the loft. They went back, sat down on the hay and looked curiously at each other.

"Kinda funny, eh?" grunted Sleepy softly.

"As viewed from a hay loft—" dryly. "Do you suppose it's just a quaint old custom around here—takin' the dead out of the corral every mornin'?"

"Might be," Sleepy said seriously. "Mebbe he died in the house and they thought it was bad luck; so they put him in the corral over night."

"Yeah, and they might have needed an extra ghost."

"Now that's an idea. Mebbe this is where they make 'em. Ghosts made while you wait. The very thoughts of such a business makes my vertybray sound like a lot of loose poker chips."

Hashknife went over to the hay hole in the end of the loft, where he squatted on his heels and watched the house. Smoke was pouring from the kitchen chimney, but Don Shiel was out on the porch, scanning the country. Beside him, leaning against the railing, was a rifle. Hashknife watched him for a long time. Finally Sleepy grunted softly, and Hashknife heard the men down near the stable. Then they came in sight, and walked together up to the porch, where the three men talked for several minutes before entering the house.

"They never spotted our horses," said Sleepy. "Mebbe it's a dang good thing for us that they didn't."

"I'm beginnin' to wish I was on my bronc headin' away from here," replied Hashknife seriously. "One of the gang was on the porch with a rifle and he might be needin' a target."

After about an hour the three men came down to the stable, saddled their horses

and rode away, luckily without seeing the two horses behind the stable. As soon as they were gone Hashknife and Sleepy slid down, secured their horses and struck the road to Del Sur.

Silver Linin' saw them ride in and go to a restaurant; so he came over. His badge was prominently displayed and his face bore a grin of welcome.

"Howdy, gents," he said pleasantly. "Didya ride in from Nash already this mornin'?"

"Started last night," replied Hashknife, spearing at an egg, "but we got caught in the drizzle."

"Drizzle? You boys must be from Oregon."

"We have been there." Sleepy grinned.

"Where didja say you stopped last night?"

"Down the road a ways. Wasn't nobody home; so we hived up in their hay loft."

"That was the Lazy S. You must have been along kinda early."

"Long about nine o'clock."

"Oh, that's right. Don Shiel, Hopeful and Old Spud was in town and waited for the rain to quit before they started home. You didn't happen to meet anybody on the road last night, didja?"

"No, we didn't meet anybody," replied Hashknife.

Silver Linin' shut one eye and puckered up his lips. The information as to what time they left Nash caused more puckers.

"I wisht I knowed what become of the damn fool," said the deputy.

"What particular fool do you mean?"

"A fool named Byers. He left here late yesterday afternoon, headin' down the road. Mebbe he was goin' to the Lazy S, mebbe to Nash. But you didn't meet him, and the boys from the Lazy S said they never seen him. Hm-m-m-m. I wonder where he went. Jist like a damn detective to fail to even foller a road."

"Detective?" queried Hashknife.

"Oh, yeah—cow detective."

"Workin' on a case here?"

"Thought he was, but jist between me and you, I don't think he was doin' any

good. Hired privately by Frank Eldon, our banker. Oh, he wasn't hidin' his light under no basket. Everybody knowed who he was and what he was doin' here. Mebbe he went to Nash. I don't reckon he'd go to the Lazy S. Don Shiel was here yesterday and he told Eldon to keep Byers away if he didn't want Byers to pine away on the hot end of a bullet."

Hashknife burned his lips on some hot coffee and rubbed his mouth thoughtfully.

"This Don Shiel evidently didn't care for Mr. Byers," he said.

Silver Linin' grinned widely.

"That seems like the case. But I dunno, this Byers ain't bright enough to accept a threat. No, I ain't doin' no big worryin' about him, but I'd like to know if he got lost, strayed or stolen."

"Is your name Smith?" asked Hashknife.

"Yep, Silver Linin' Smith. Christened Robert Alexander, dehorned to plain Bob, and one day they hit me over the head with a bottle of beer, launched me out into the world and said, 'Silver Linin' fits you like a glove.'"

Hashknife laughed at the deputy's serious statement.

"You had an experience with a ghost, didn't you, Smith?"

"Ghost? Not less than three of 'em. Right now I'm the greatest authority on ghosts in this country. I ain't never pulled off none of them see-ances, but I shore know m' spirits."

"I suppose you are the only livin' person who ever saw a ghost shoot a shotgun."

"Pardner, I am. And I *seen* him. You heard about it, eh?"

"Your fame is spreadin'," said Sleepy, shoving his plate aside.

"Well, yeah, I s'pose she is. But I earned it. The hell of it was they killed the bridegroom. Socked him with a load of buckshot."

"Wasn't there some horses stolen by the three ghosts?"

"Shore was. They lifted a dozen out of the corral at the Quarter Circle E, and

they downed Teddy MacRae, 'cause he happened to wander out there about that time in the evenin'."

"Three ghosts in that party, too?"

"Three—accordin' to MacRae."

Hashknife introduced himself and Sleepy to Silver Linin' and was satisfied that their names meant nothing to him. They spent the morning lounging around the town, and later they met Rowdy Roberts, who was a little concerned over the detective Byers's disappearance.

Sleepy was in favor of telling the sheriff what they had seen at the Lazy S, but Hashknife told him to keep still about it. There was no doubt in their minds that the dead man had been Byers.

"Who do you reckon killed him?" wondered Sleepy.

Hashknife grinned thoughtfully.

"That's hard to answer, pardner; but it don't pay to monkey with ghosts."

"That's what I said when we started for this danged place."

"We ain't monkeyin' with 'em."

"'Course not; we jist came here on account of the climate."



DON SHIEL came to town, and the two cowboys recognized him by his clothes as being one of the three who had disposed of the dead man. Hashknife had a good opportunity to study Shiel, as he talked with the sheriff. Rowdy was anxious to find some trace of Byers, but Don was not able to give him any information.

"Still checkin' up on your brand, Don?" asked the sheriff.

"For all the good it's doin' me."

"You don't think somebody has been stealin' your horses, do you?"

Don's eyes blazed quickly.

"I don't like the way you said that."

"Why, I merely meant that your stock—"

"Ought to be immune, eh?"

"Well, I dunno. Mebbe I was wrong. Didn't your father leave any sort of a record of sales and all that?"

"Not a scratch."

"Then you don't know what your count ought to be."

"I've got some idea, Rowdy."

The sheriff turned away, and Don called after him:

"I hope you find your detective. He can't amount to much if he needs a sheriff to keep track of him."

Rowdy had no ready reply, so he said nothing. Silver Linin' was greatly amused as he introduced Hashknife and Sleepy to Don.

"These two men slept in your hay loft last night, Don," said the deputy.

"In my hay loft—last night?" It seemed a distinct shock to Don.

"We was out in that rain," explained Hashknife. "It shore was wet. There wasn't anybody at the house; so we tied our horses behind the stable, out of the wind and rain, and slept in the hay."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"It was plenty comfortable," said Hashknife.

"I'm glad of that."

After a few more moments of conversation Don went to his horse and rode out of town. Hashknife and Sleepy wandered over to the bank.

"You haven't seen Byers, have you?" asked the old man anxiously.

Hashknife laughed.

"I reckon he's quit the job."

"Not with money coming to him—"

As they went out they saw the sheriff and deputy crossing the street to the livery stable. They were walking fast; so the two cowboys went down to see what had happened, and found them inside the stable, looking at a saddled horse. One bridle rein was missing, the other broken.

"Take off the saddle and put it in the grain room," ordered the sheriff grimly.

There was a smear of what appeared to be blood on the fork of the saddle, and a streak of it extended down the animal's shoulder.

"That's Byers's horse," explained the sheriff. "It jist wandered in a few moments ago. It looks as though somebody finished that detective."



FENCES

By

T. R. ELLIS

IF THE Comet hadn't burned out a rod bearin' it wouldn't have taken a mechanic all night to put one in; and if it hadn't taken the mechanic all night I wouldn't have stayed in Bakersfield—but the Comet did, the mechanic did and I did. As a result I made a first contact with a lad who's slated to make the speedway world sit up and finger its racin' program.

Witness: On the afternoon of August 8, 1926, I pull up at a gas station in San Rachel, when I should've been two hundred miles farther north, watchin' Jimmy Horton burn up the San José speedway with my Duesenberg. While the tank's bein' filled I notice the main and only stem of the town is dressed up with flags and streamers so it looks like battleship row in San Francisco Bay. Handin' the sour lookin' attendant my dough, I ask—

"How soon does the admiral come aboard?"

He gives me a blank look with my change, and grunts—

"Huh?"

I try again, slow and patient—

"I know Grant has taken Richmond and the spirits of '76 can be had for a price—but what's the rest of the flags for?"

He stops that one, and answers—

"This is the last day of the San Rachel rodeo."

That kinda clicks. Back in the days before I started chasin' high powered

buzzwagons around speedways, I used to think I was somethin' of a Don Knows-His-Oats on a horse, but bronc ridin' was too dangerous and I gave it up for automobile racin'.

Knowin' I ain't goin' to get to San José for the race, I get a yen to see part of the rodeo. The attendant tells me how to get there, so I gun the Comet outa the gas station on a wheel and a half, juggle the directions in the back of my bean, then divide 'em by three, and in due time park the car near the grandstand inside the rodeo grounds.

After makin' a dollar deposit I wander around the outside of the arena to where three cowhands are sittin' on the fence near the corral chutes. I home-stead both arms and a chin on the top rail next to 'em and, not bein' proud, I don't make no effort to keep from hearin' what's said.

The one closest to me opens up first—"If he straddles this 'un the show's over."

The one in the middle draws, kinda doubtful—

"Uh-huh, but that Movin' Pitchers animal is shore bad medicine."

"No foolin'," cuts in the guy on the other end, "I notice Skeets Miller don't crave no more of it, and he's champ for three years now."

"Hey, fella," I yelp, shy-like, "who's ridin' what?"

All three of 'em turn and look me over, then the closest one asks in a voice

you could knock the icicles off of —
"Stranger round these parts, mister?"

Bein' dressed in white coveralls with a pair of racin' goggles slung round my neck, it's a cinch I don't look like a cowpoke, and I know I ain't got no business back by the corrals.

"Name's Joe Anderson," I tell him, "from Los Angeles, and thanks for your big hearted welcome."

The one in the middle looks a little harder at me, then asks—

"You wouldn't be Gunner Anderson, now, would you?"

"No less," I tell him modestly—loud enough for the grandstand to hear.

"Come up on the fence with the ee-lite, Gunner," he says. "Shorty, move over and make room for a *hombre* that kin drive a auto two miles before you could loop a yearlin'. I know, because I seen him do it once."

They thaw out then and proceed to enlighten me as to the whys and wherefores of this particular rodeo. It seems a lad named Lee Stevens, a local product, is about due to ride a lot of poison on four legs called Moving Pictures. They explain that this horse tossed the champion for a barrel roll just the day before, and if Stevens can make the grade he's entitled to wear the champ's belt or crown—or whatever it is they give bronc riders—for a year. I get a good look at the boy when Shorty calls him over to speak to him. He has a scrappin' chin and the kind of gray eyes I like, but he looks sorta worried as Shorty says:

"He's here, Lee. I seen 'im go into the stands."

"Do you suppose he knows anything?" Lee asks.

"I don't think so," answers Shorty. "You wasn't supposed to make this ride, and it ain't on the program."

At that he's called away to the chutes to get ready for his mount.

The announcer swings his megaphone and yells:

"Ladee-e-eez and gen-tlemen! The fee-chure ee-vent of the San Rachel Rodeo! Lee-e-ee Stee-vens on Moving-g-g Pictures, Chute Num-bah Two-o-o! Chute Num-bah Two-o-oo—Lee Stevens on Moving Pictures! Let 'er buck!"

A gun cracks. The stands let out a

roar. A chute gate swings wide and half a ton of kickin', fightin' horseflesh, under a ridin', fightin' buckaroo, shoots into the middle of the arena. Boy! It's more thrill than seein' Tom Milton and Ralph De Palma in a two-car match race.

For a few seconds horse, man and dust blend into a hazy blur, and all I can see plain is the blazin' red neckerchief of the rider. Buckin', twistin', sun-fishin', that Movin' Pictures animal tries all the old tricks and a few he made up himself. Fannin', and scratchin' his mount with every jump, Stevens is ridin' like he's nailed in the saddle. After what seems like a long time the horse brings him close to us in a series of stiff legged jumps, and I can see the boy is bleedin' from the mouth and nose. Bronc and rider are usin' their best shot now, and somebody's due to get licked pretty quick. Then the animal spins on his hind legs and bucks straight across the arena. As he nears the opposite fence Shorty grips the top rail and groans:

"The fence, Lee! Watch the fence!"

Seems, for a split second, like he might have heard. He starts to kick loose from the right stirrup, but before he can make it—crash!—they hit sideways. The horse spins again and starts right back toward us. The right stirrup is floppin' crazy now, and Stevens' right leg is hangin' limp. As they get close we tumble off that top rail fast. About three feet from the fence Movin' Pictures sets his four-foot brakes and slides to a sudden stop. The rider clears the top rail by a foot and lands in a heap. Shorty gets to him first and, proppin' up his shoulders, asks—

"Are you bad hurt, kid?"

"Not bad, Shorty," he answers, wipin' at the blood and dust on his face. "Leg's busted, I think."

Then seein' the other puncher, he adds—

"Tennessee, you and Shorty get me outa here before he sees me, will you?"

"But, Lee," protests the tall puncher, "let the doc look at you first."

"Doctor, hell!" he snaps. "Get me out of here!"

Tennessee thinks fast and, turnin' to me, asks:

"You got a car here, Gunner, ain'tcha?"

"Sure," I tell him, "over there by the

stands. Put 'im in the back and tell me where you want him to go."

While we're makin' him comfortable as possible, Shorty says:

"Take him up to the hospital in Salinas. Me an' Tennessee'll wait here by the gate. If any one tries to follow we'll tell 'em you've just gone to town and stall 'em off long as possible."

"Listen, fella," I answer, slidin' under the wheel, "after I gun this hunk o' iron outa that gate you can let 'em all out."

About a half hour up the highway I look back to see if the boy's all right. He's in a lot of pain, but manages to push a crooked smile through the beads of sweat on his face, and says:

"Mister, if it isn't too much bother, would you take me right on through Salinas and drop me off at Gilroy? Anybody wantin' to see me would look in Salinas."

"O.K., son. Gilroy it is."

I wonder about who or what he's runnin' from, but he don't offer any information, and any damn fool can ask questions.



THE next year the racin' season opens with the Decoration Day meet at Medford, Oregon, and as usual me and Jimmy Horton are there a few days ahead, workin' the bugs outa the Duesenberg. Jimmy is just a few years younger than I am, which puts him on the lyin' side of forty, and because of his sixteen years of speedway he don't think he knows all there is to know about it. He's made the racin' pilgrimage over the dirt tracks and board speedways to the burnin' brick oval at Indianapolis, and when his age slowed him up some he came back over the same trail. In the four years he's been pointin' my Duesy he hasn't finished first very often and he hasn't busted any track records, but he has managed to stay in the money pretty consistent and keep the car between the fences on the track.

Late in the afternoon of our second day in Medford I'm sittin' on the runnin' board of the Comet while Jimmy is out with the Duesy chasin' his tail around the mile course. I'm concentratin' on a stopwatch when a kinda familiar voice asks—

"You're Mr. Anderson, aren't you?"

Jimmy has just whanged outa the north turn and is barrelin' up the stretch, so I keep my eye pinned on the watch in my hand as I answer:

"Mister Anderson was my father. I'm Gunner Anderson."

I snap the watch as the Duesy smears itself over the line and into the south turn. Then I look up. Standin' in front of me, with a dry grin pinned all over his map, is Lee Stevens. Hoppin' to my feet, I stick out my hand and say:

"Hello, son. Didn't mean to wise-crack you. How are you anyway?"

"All right, Gunner, thanks." His smile warms up, but his troubled gray eyes tell me nothin's all right.

It don't take much savvy to see the boy's been through the mill since I saw him last. He's wearin' a gray hickory shirt and a ten-gallon hat that's considerable battered. His waist overalls look thin at the knees and faded from many scrubbin's. His boots, though, tell most of the story. They're worn at the ankles and look pretty well shot. A guy that's been raised in the cow country may get careless about his clothes, but unless he's up against it bad he won't wear down-at-the-heel boots.

Another thing I notice particular—his bright red silk neckerchief is gone. That makes me gulp like a sob sister. Maybe I'm soft, but it reminds me of a book I read once, 'bout a fella that lost his "badge of courage."

Suddenly realizin' the kid's gettin' embarrassed under my steady stare, I sit down on the runnin' board again and say—

"Sit down, Lee, and tell me 'bout yourself."

He walks with a little limp as he comes over to the car, but before sittin' down he reaches inside his shirt and digs out a tobacco sack. Dumpin' out a thin little wad of bills, he hands it to me, sayin'—

"Here's part of the money you left for me at the hospital in Gilroy."

If I'd said a word then, I'd 'a' bawled.

He goes on:

"Thanks for doin' that, Gunner. I'm sorry I haven't more to give you. I've been workin' in a cannery at Monterey all Winter, and they don't pay much.

You see—"lookin' away and speakin' real soft—"I can't ride any more."

I take the little wad of bills because I don't know what else to do. But, man, imagine a fella that's been used to horses and cows and the open range workin' in a cannery!

Both of us sit quiet for several minutes, while Jimmy Horton sizzles the red Duesenberg round and round the course. Finally I get up and dig a suit of white coveralls and a gray cap out of the back of the Comet. Droppin' 'em in his lap, I say, real casual:

"Put 'em on, son. From now on you're part of the pit crew of Gunner Anderson's red Duesenberg, No. 5."

His face reddens as he snaps—

"I'm not askin' for—"

"You're not gettin' it," I interrupt. "Anybody'll tell you Gunner Anderson gets a hundred and twenty-nine cents outa every buck he puts out. I'm gettin' too old for the twenty-four hour shifts it takes to keep a racin' motor runnin'."

While he's gettin' into the things Jimmy rolls the Duesy up to the pit with the motor chucklin' along at idlin' speed.

"Hey!" he whoops at me. "You gonna leave me out there till I run outa gas? Is this meet gonna be a six-day bicycle race?"

"Cut your switch," I tell him, "and meet the new member of the crew."

As they shake hands Jimmy grins and says:

"You'll have to watch that guy, Lee. He's so old he's only half a jump ahead of crutches. His specialty is gettin' young fellows like you and me and workin' 'em to death."

"Old?" I squawk. "You don't hear me beefin' about drivin' a couple practice laps."

"No," he comes back, "and I don't see you drivin' none, neither."

Lee has speared a rag out of the back of the Comet and is busy wipin' the track dust off the race car. He smiles at this bit of pannin', then looks up and says:

"I don't see where I'll be much help. I'm not up on motors."

"Shure," consoles Jimmy, "and neither were the Wright brothers till they had to have one to fly a airplane with."



THE Medford meet comes off as per schedule, and Lee gets his baptism of dust and castor oil smoke while Jimmy clicks the Duesy into third place. In the middle of June we go to San José and collect second money.

Fourth of July we race at San Luis Obispo, and it's there Lee finds out that the racin' racket is no pink tea. The main event is a fifty-mile grind, and at thirty-five laps Tony Marelo is leadin' the pack with his D-O Fronty. As he goes into the west turn on the thirty-sixth a left front spindle lets go and his car comes through the inside rail rollin' over and over. Me and Lee get to him first, but the little Italian has taken his final checker, never knowin' what hit him. He's far from bein' a pleasant sight, and Lee's jaw muscles quiver in his set, white face as he helps me lift the body on to the stretcher. Afterward we go back to our pit, and Lee takes up the business of signalin' Jimmy in the Duesy as if nothin' had happened.

It's a long hop from a rodeo to a speedway, but I guess the men that do the gunnin' in both are pretty much alike. Anyway, Lee takes to high speed and the roarin' bowl as if he'd never done anything else. His talk is full of cam-actions, piston-displacements and revolutions; and by the middle of the season he's drivin' nearly all the warmin'-up laps. He spends long hours beneath the race car, workin' under Jimmy's directions, and comes up covered with oil and grease, but smilin'.

In August we jump to Salt Lake City and for the first time in years I watch a race from the grandstand. Lee and Jimmy work together so smooth I'm just so much excess baggage in the pits. Whenever the Duesy ain't in the race Lee spends his time squattin' in the infield, near the turns, watchin' the lead footed speed hounds jockey around.

After that the season slips away, race at a time, and before we know it the last race of the year is starin' us in the face. Accordin' to the entry blank the Pacific Coast Championship is to be a hundred-mile event, and will be held on the mile course at Stockton on the last Sunday in September.

We get settled in Stockton about a

week before the date, and right away Lee and Jimmy develop a sudden yen for early mornin' practise. Rollin' out of bed around six, they're back in town at eleven, and spend most of the afternoons at the garage. Thinkin', of course, they're tryin' to sidestep the heat of the day, I don't wonder about it particularly; and, besides, it's a relief to sleep late in the mornin' without hearin' them gabblin' in the next room.

Thursday I roll out of bed around eight and start out of the hotel to collect my usual coffee-and. As I drop the key on the desk the clerk hands me a letter for Jimmy. Havin' nothin' to do and a lot of time to do it in, I decide to take it out to him, so I borrow a car at the garage and drive to the track. Takin' a short cut up through the grandstand, I hear a race car blatin' around the mile loop like it might be in a hurry. When I get high enough to see the track I find things are really happenin'. My red Duesy jabs her pointed nose outa the north turn and roars up the front stretch, whines through the south curve in a series of broadside jumps and howls down the back straightaway.

Forgettin' all about what I came out for, I snatch out my stopwatch. Timin' a lap, I call the watch a liar and time another. This time I get the same answer—forty and two-fifth seconds! That's the tightest the Duesy's been wound up since I've owned it. Wonderin' what's got Jimmy so hopped up, I glance across the track. My lungs go flat and I wilt into a seat.

Jimmy Horton is standin' in the pit!

While I'm still in a daze the car rolls to a stop and, as Lee crawls out from behind the wheel, Jimmy shouts somethin' I can't hear as he slaps the boy on the back. Decidin' it's about time I took a hand in the deal, I amble down through the stands and cross the track by way of the starter's gate. As I come up to the pit Lee spots me first. He looks a little sheepish as he sings out—"Hello, Gunner."

Before I can say anything, Jimmy demands—

"What d'ya think of your new race driver?"

"I didn't know I had one," I tell him.

"Well, you have," announces Jimmy,

with a fightin' look on his Irish mug, "and he just turned the track in forty and four-fifths. How does that sound?"

"Sounds like you had a rubber spring in your stopwatch. I timed him at forty and two-fifths."

"Then you know he's fast. Got any objections to him drivin' the car?"

"This is a hell of a fine time to be askin' me."

They both look so disappointed I kinda ease up on 'em a bit, and say:

"I don't know as I object particularly. Of course, I'm only the guy that owns the car, but I'd like to see him drive more than one lap."

They both look relieved, and Jimmy says—

"Get in the wagon, kid, and do your paces for a hard-headed owner."

In two shakes Jimmy has the motor wound up and Lee is pullin' out on the course again. Hunchin' over the wheel and cockin' his head out the side of the cowlin' like a veteran, he makes two rounds, gradually pickin' up speed. The third time by he nods and we drag out the watches. The Duesy starts her howlin' whine and comes down the front stretch to turn the fourth lap in forty-one seconds. Jimmy snaps the fifth round in forty and two-fifths, and I catch the sixth at forty, flat.

Lee and the Duesy round the north turn with a long slide that carries 'em almost to the outside fence as they start up the front, finishin' the seventh; and as the car thunders into the south curve with no break in the roar of the exhaust, Jimmy's face goes white and his stopwatch drops to dangle from the cord on his belt. When the red tail of the car goes out of sight the exhaust stops, picks up for a second, then stops again. Before I can think Jimmy has me by the arm and we're climbin' the inside fence. Just as we touch ground on the other side I hear the piercin' squeal of slidin' tires and a splinterin' crash; then everything is quiet except for the poundin' of our feet toward the cloud of dust risin' at the southeast turn, and Jimmy's moan:

"He took his foot off in the turn! He took his foot off!"

After a hundred years of runnin' we get there. The car is right side up, but

there's a twenty foot hole in the fence where she's spun around and come through tail first. Lee is sittin' on the right rear wheel, moppin' a splinter scratch on the side of his face.

"Are you hurt, Lee?" yells Jimmy.

Lee just keeps dabbin' a handkerchief to the side of his face and don't answer. Jimmy gives the boy's shoulder a frantic shake and screams—

"Lee, are you hurt?"

"No!" the kid shouts back; then wails, almost in tears, "But look at the car!"

While Jimmy's lookin' the boy over for broken bones I inspect the car. It ain't near as bad as it looks; the left rear snubber is snapped off, the rear axle housin' has slipped forward a couple inches on the spring and the tail and hood are banged up some, all of which can be made as good as new with the application of a couple dollars and a couple days' labor.

Meanwhile Jimmy's decided the boy ain't ready for the morgue yet, and in less than an hour we're headed toward town, towin' the wreck. On the way in we've all been silent for about ten minutes, when suddenly Lee explodes:

"Fences! Damn fences, anyway! First I get in a fight with my father because I won't ride a drift fence, then a bronc tosses me over another and out of the rodeo game. Now I take a race car through one. Maybe I'll learn to stay away from 'em after while."

"Fences got you licked, huh?" I remark.

Gettin' no answer, I continue—

"You remember that old-timer, what's-is-name, that got hisself a bronc and put on a high power drive against windmills, a couple hundred years ago?"

I see by the boy's look he knows who I mean, and is wonderin' what that's got to do with fence bustin'.

"When I was in school," I go on, "the kids used to get a big laugh out of that, but I never thought it was so silly. Maybe windmills had the Indian sign on 'em, and he just had to take one apart before he could feel right. I never read the rest of the book, but I betcha he was a better man afterward than he was before. Providin', of course, he stuck to his job and didn't give a damn

what the grandstand thought about it."



THAT afternoon and night and the next day and night we put in a lot of back-breakin' labor on the Duesy, with few sleepin' hours in between. Saturday mornin' we finish the last of the repairs and go to the track, where Jimmy drives a few test laps to satisfy himself everything's all right. After that we tow back to town again. By three o'clock in the afternoon a body man has ironed out the dents, a local painter has covered up the scars and the car is her shinin' red self.

That evenin' I'm sittin' in the hotel lobby thinkin' things over when Lee and Jimmy come in and sit down on either side of me.

"Gunner," says Jimmy, "Lee thinks I ought to drive tomorrow."

"Knowin' how he feels about fences, I don't blame him."

That's a kinda dirty thing to say, and the boy's voice is sharp as he cuts in:

"My private jinx is outside the argument. Besides, a race car is a damned expensive thing for an amateur to experiment with."

"That's right," I prod him a little more, "especially if that amateur is worried about the status of his neck. But why blame it on a jinx?"

Jimmy's face reddens, like it does when he's gettin' sore, and Lee's gray eyes flame as he snaps:

"All right. I'll drive!"

"You'll not," barks Jimmy. "I'll—"

"Hold everything," I soothe 'em. "Suppose we take a drag offa the peace pipe and chew this over."

They quiet down, and I tell Lee:

"Now look, son, here's the way I see it. You've got this thing to beat, and the best time and place is here and now. I'm gamblin' my race car against your neck that you can. Your little spill the other day may be the best thing that ever happened to you. Anyhow, I'm pretty sure you'll never take your foot off the throttle again or reach for your brake in the turn. If you don't want to gamble, that's your business, but if you do I'm willin' to toss my race car in the pot."

That holds 'em for a few minutes, then

Lee speaks, and his voice is low and steady:

"You win, Gunner. I'll drive."

After that we go to my room and I get out a new white drivin' suit and tell him to try it on. When he's buttonin' up the neck Jimmy comes in from the next room and says:

"Here, Lee, I'd consider it a kind of favor if you'd wear my helmet and glasses. They're lucky. I've had 'em nine years and I've never been in a crack-up."

I whistle quietly to myself. It's bein' announced that Jimmy Horton has driven his last race; and it's the first time in the years I've known him that he's deliberately lied. He's been cracked up four times that I know of.

Then I toss Lee a package, and as he unwraps the bright, red silk neckerchief I'd bought that afternoon all he can say is:

"Aw, Gunner—thanks. I was going to buy one myself, but I thought everybody'd laugh at me."

"Wear it, son. You had one the first time I saw you, and you've never looked quite right to me without it."



THE day of the race we show up at the track around ten in the mornin'. The tow-car's unloaded, the pit's in order, and Lee does a few practise laps before eleven. By that time more race cars start driftin' in. Lookin' over the gang, I see some pretty fast cars and pilots. Chuck Darrel is on the job with his blue Frontenac; Jack Logan and his D-O Fronty; and Dave Madden and his yellow Frontenac. There's fourteen entries, includin' the usual number of clunks that will be weeded out in the qualifyin'. I point out the ones Lee has never seen in action and try to tell him somethin' of their drivin' habits. Among this last is Madden, and when we pass him I tell Lee:

"There's a combination you want to look out for, boy. He don't like me half as much as I like him, and that's awful little. He tried to doublecross me once and got the worst of it, and he'll try to make it hard for you. Be sure you have a clean sweep if you try to pass him, and do it as quick as possible."

"All right, Gunner," he answers. "I'll remember."

The qualifyin' starts at one o'clock, and of the first three cars to make the circuit, two of 'em take more than the time limit of forty-five seconds. Chuck Darrell is called to the line, and his blue Frontenac smokes around the oval to the tune of forty and three-fifths. I remark to Lee—

"You're seein' the really fast boys in action now."

"I can do it faster," he replies.

"Yeah?" says Jimmy, real quick. "You can, but you won't. C'mere till I show you somethin'."

Walkin' him over to the car, Jimmy puts his finger on the tachometer.

"See that mark? When you qualify, keep the needle right on it. That'll bring you around in about forty-two seconds and it'll put you well back in the startin' line-up. If you'd been in the game longer I'd tell you to go out and shoot for pole position, but you ain't had enough experience to try to take that first turn away from guys like Mulford, Darrel and Madden."

Lee nods, then he's called to the line. Jimmy and I are kinda nervous, but the boy takes it as calm as if he'd been born in a speed chariot. The red Duesenberg is a sweet lookin' job and Lee, with a splash of the same color around the neck of his white coveralls, is a trim lookin' pilot. He takes his trial run and is back in a few minutes, havin' turned the track in forty-two and a fifth. Me an' Jimmy feel pretty good about that, for it shows the boy knows what he's doin' and has learned to take orders.

While the rest of 'em are qualifyin' several pilots come to our pit to speak to Lee. Madden is one of them, and as usual, he starts to sound off:

"So you're gonna drive that heap, huh? Well, keep it away from me. I don't like—"

Jimmy steps in between 'em, balancin' a twelve-inch wrench on his right palm.

"Listen, fella," he interrupts, "some day you're gonna open that big yap of yours and get it closed permanent. On your way!"

After that Mulford, one of the fastest and cleanest, comes over. He shakes

hands with Lee, welcomin' him into the speed gang, and winds up sayin':

"We're not all like Madden. If you get a chance to go by me, come right ahead, and I'll move over and give you every inch of track I can spare."

A few minutes before startin' time I sit Lee down on a spare wheel and deliver the final lecture.

"The most dangerous part of any race," I orate, "is when the starter drops the flag and the mob makes a break for the first turn. Take it easy then and let the gang up in front fight for the lead. Remember this is no ten-mile sprint race—it's a hundred miles, so save yourself and your car when you can. You learned the other day that it takes more than a heavy throttle foot to win races, so use your head. Outside of that, *you're* drivin' the race. Drive it the way you want and use your own best judgment."

"And the luck o' the Irish go with you," adds Jimmy as we roll the car to startin' position.

This Stockton track is wide, but the promoter plays it safe and starts only three abreast. Mulford with his black Duesenberg, No. 7, gets the pole; then Darrel's blue Frontenac and Madden's yellow one. In the second row are Bill Fossen in a green Rajo, Jack Logan in the D-O and Lon Amring in a brown Miller Special. Lee and the red Duesy sport their No. 5 at the pole in the third row. The rest of 'em figure so little in the events that follow, I don't remember what cars they were or who drove 'em. The qualifyin' has trimmed the number of starters down to twelve.

The starter tells Mulford about the pacemakin' lap, then comes down the lineup on a quick tour of inspection. Back in front again, he waves his hand. Cranks spin and twelve motors take up a cracklin' roar that gradually settles to a patient drone. Then the starter steps back and let's them go, and me an' Jimmy get in the clear as they start rollin'.

They go into the south turn slow, then sweep down the back stretch, lined up like West Pointers. In the north turn they're out of sight for a second, then wheel out on to the front straightaway. The starter steps out to the edge of the

track and, when the front line is about a hundred feet from him, flips his flag and cuts 'em loose. Back wheels throw up a shower of grit as throttles are jammed to the boards, and they hit the turn in a smother of dust and oil smoke. I jump up on the fence and count 'em as they come outa the cloud and down the back.

Mulford rounds the turn first, leadin' Darrel and Madden by a car length, then Lon Amring follows with the brown Miller a hundred feet behind 'em. My heart pauses—then picks up its beat as the red Duesy, with the tails of Lee's red neckerchief stringin' in the wind, tears down the stretch after Amring. The rest of 'em trail along in ones and twos, but I only count ten. The green Rajo and the D-O Fronty have tangled in the turn and Logan and Bill Fossen are walkin' back to their pits, lookin' down at the mouth.

The next few laps Mulford steps his lead up a little and the rest of 'em hold their position, gettin' settled for the ride and catchin' their second wind. While everything's normal I run over to Bill Fossen's pit to ask how bad his car's hurt.



WHEN I get back Jimmy has a tall guy backed up against the pit fence, tellin' him plenty and holdin' his favorite weapon—the twelve-inch wrench—to keep him there. At first glance my brain shrieks "Sheriff!" and flashes back to the first day I saw Lee, and his words, "Get me outta here before he sees me!" A closer look, though, shows somethin' familiar about his gray eyes and pointed chin, and I have him pegged. He's wearin' a black stockman's hat, Windsor tie and a black broadcloth suit, all of which fits in with my reasonin'.

"What's it all about, Jimmy," I demand.

"I think this guy's a law, Gunner. He came bustin' in here after you left, wantin' to know if Lee Stevens was in that red car, then says he's gonna stop the race and get him out. I picked up old faithful, here, and told him he ain't goin' no place to get nobody."

"Stout fella! Sit him on the tool box

and keep him with us."

Turnin' to the stranger, I growl in the toughest tone I can muster:

"Listen, mister, if that boy in the red car hadn't been worried about your interferin' he'd still be able to do the thing he liked best—ride horses. He's in the racin' racket now. It's a tough game, and nobody's gonna make it any tougher for him. When it comes to makin' it tough for people I ain't such an amateur myself."

He don't look scared worth a damn, but he does stay on his box. I turn my attention back to the track. Twenty-two miles are gone, and Mulford has increased his lead to nearly half a lap. Darrel and Madden are still fightin' for second place, broadsidin' the turns side by side. Amring is slowly closin' up on the two of 'em, and Lee's about the same distance in back of Amring. Two of the cars that have been bringin' up the rear are in their pits and another is splutterin' along on two barrels.

For quite awhile everything is steady, but the pace gradually gets faster. On the thirty-fifth round Mulford is just about ready to lap the field when his right rear tire lets go in the north turn. The black Duesenberg gives Mulford a bad half second, but years of racin' experience stand by him, and he tools his mount down off the bank and gets it stopped without passin' his pit.

By the time the change is made, though, he's lost all his lead and goes back into the race in seventh place. By the forty-fifth lap Madden's taken a slight lead on Darrel, but Darrel is pushin' him so hard they're slidin' all over the course and nobody can get by. Lee has shortened the gap between him and Amring; Mulford has moved up to fifth place and is drivin' like a whirlwind to get back the lead.

At the halfway mark Madden still leads, followed close by Darrel, Amring, Lee and Mulford. Two of the local hunks of iron have been lapped and are over a mile behind. For the next ten laps Lee stays right on the tail of the brown Miller, waitin' for a chance to take him easy.

On the sixty-fifth he takes him, but not easy. As they blast into the south turn Amring's car throws a rear wheel

forty feet in the air. The car wingdings to the right. Lee pulls the Duesy over and goes through on the left. The Miller swings back down, hits the inside rail, bounces out in a fast spin and smashes through the outside rail. Mulford misses that spin by the thickness of a cigaret paper, and blasts down the back straightaway after Lee, who is pushin' the red Duesy closer and closer to the flyin' leaders.

The crowd is still on its feet lookin' toward the turn where Amring went through the fence, and in a few minutes Lon climbs the rail and waves his arms. Jimmy looks at me. His face is scared. I shake my head and draw breath again. We both glance at our visitor, but his face registers nothin' as he sits rigid on the tool box.

When Amring comes by, a little later, I grab his arm, and say—

"Tough goin', Lon."

"Sa-a-ay," he answers, eyes glitterin', "that new chauffeur of yours is dynamite, and he'll run the wheels off'n some more of those hacks before the race is over."

At seventy-five miles the time is posted, and they've knocked the socks off of all standin' dirt track records by turnin' that distance in fifty-five minutes and twenty-two seconds. Madden has stretched his lead a couple hundred feet, and Lee is holdin' the Duesy right behind Darrel. For three or four rounds he's blocked there, then Darrel comes outa the north turn swipin' at his glasses and holdin' his car close to the rail. Before he can get his hand down from his face, Lee pulls up alongside. The boy crowds the veteran to the rail all the way down the front stretch, then, drivin' like a master, cuts him off in the south turn and streaks after Madden.

As Darrel comes by again I know he's burnt up because the youngster has worked the time-worn trick on him, but Mulford has closed up on him now, and Darrel's got a sweet job on his hands keepin' ahead of the black car. On the seventy-ninth Madden gets the surprise of his life as he roars up the front straightaway and looks out beside his seat to see the Duesy's red nose where Darrel's blue Frontenac had been earlier in the race.

Then the competition gets hard. Madden pulls away a little, takes the middle of the track and does a lot of dirty slidin' on the turns to keep the boy blocked. Lee is holdin' what he's got, hopin' for a chance to break into the lead. Darrel and Mulford, stagin' a real battle for third position, are within fifty feet of the two leaders.

I'm gettin' worried now. The pace is terrific, and the boy is out there tangled up with four hard-drivin', seasoned race pilots, who wouldn't show any mercy to their own brothers if they happened to be racin' against 'em. I signal Lee to ease up and get outa the jam. He sees the signal—and ignores it. Finally I can't stand the pressure and, turnin' to Jimmy, I shout—

"It's too damn tough for him—I'm gonna call him in!"

Jimmy nods. I get the slate and print "stop" on it in big letters.

As I start for the track the slate is knocked out of my hand and I spin to look into the blazin' gray eyes of our visitor.

I'm so surprised I stop in my tracks. He says:

"You said I interfered with him before. See that you don't now. If this is what he chooses to do, let him do it. I'm his father, and if I can stand it, you'll have to!"

His face is as white as Jimmy's, but his voice carries the ring of crankshaft steel. After all, there's no answer to his argument, and bein' the boy's father sure as hell gives him prior rights.

With the next few rounds, however, my worries flatten themselves out. As the cars whine into the ninetieth, Lee chases Madden into the south turn so fast the Frontenac slides clear to the outside rail. Before Madden can recover, the red Duesenberg and Darrel's blue Frontenac go by on the inside; and as they broadside into the back straightaway Mulford passes up the yellow Frontenac too, leavin' Madden in fourth

place without a chance of gettin' back what he's lost. Another lap and Lee is steadily pullin' away from the field. As the red Duesy flashes by on the ninety-third Jimmy pounds the pit rail and shouts—

"Barrel 'er, Lee, barrel 'er!"

On the other side of me the boy's father sails that stockman's hat high in the air as he yells—

"Ride 'em, cowboy!"

The race is on ice now, and in a few more minutes the starter swings the green flag, to follow it on the next lap with the checker. As Lee backs off his throttle and tours around I turn to his father and ask:

"What d'ya think of the boy now? Has he got guts?"

"I never doubted it," he shouts at me, "any more than I doubted his stubbornness."

"Uh-huh," I agree. "Funny 'bout stubbornness. In us it's bein' strong-minded; in the other guy it's bein' bull-headed."

As the car glides into the pit the crowd thunders its approval of the winner. The boy is grinnin' tired-like through the oil and grime on his face as me an' Jimmy help him out of the car, but his eyes widen when he looks over our shoulder and sees his dad. The old-timer pushes by us; then, holdin' out his hand to the boy, he says:

"Good work, son. I'm sorry I interfered before. If you'd rather do this than what I wanted you to do, I'm for you."

Lee takes the hand with both of his and says nothin'.

The older man's eyes crinkle as he gives a little tug at the piece of oil-stained silk around the boy's neck and remarks—

"You still carry your red neckerchief into tough places, don't you?"

"I have to carry it, dad." Lee grins. "Jimmy and Gunner'll tell you I never could have made the grade without it."



The MAN *from* NOWHERE

By GEORGES SURDEZ

MATHIAS VYANOR was one of the handful of men which compels the French Foreign Legion to include on its statistical records the classification, "Miscellaneous nationalities."

At Bou Mighalt, a military post of the High Plateau, the region lifting like a gigantic wall to separate the fertile zone of Algeria from the arid immensity of the Sahara, no one could ascertain his place of birth, his origin or his race. The Chinese Legionnaire in the Second Section, who came from Canton and had seen much of his country; the Tonkinese private brought down by the captain to cook his favorite rice dishes; sundry Siberians, Turks and Balkanese scattered in the company—all disclaimed kinship with him or knowledge of his language.

The regimental files yielded scanty in-

formation. Vyanor, Mathias, was "presumably Asiatic, about thirty years old," and had enlisted at Nantes in France. He was not an impressive soldier, standing less than five foot three, with a sturdy, round torso, shaped somewhat like a rum keg, propped on stumpy legs. His face was a fleshy, yellowish disk, on which brows, nose, lips and chin were dwarfed by protruding cheekbones.

One of the scribes in the company's office, who read police publications of the more serious type, noted odd calouses and scars on Vyanor's hands, which he described in a letter to an expert in Europe. In reply, he received the information that Vyanor, Mathias, probably had been a sailor, or a fisherman, or in several other suggested trades.

Despite his unfailing readiness to obey when he understood what was expected of him, his good humor and his contagious, quick grin, it was difficult to understand how Vyanor had contrived to pass through the various training bases—Sidi bel Abbes, Saïda, Ain-el-Hadjar, Geryville. However, Sergeant-Chief Schlager gave an explanation clear to all, when he stated that had it been in his power, Vyanor would have passed

through Bou Mighalt and gone elsewhere without delay.

The queer little chap understood perhaps fifty words of French, aside from military orders; and those he often misinterpreted, pivoting right instead of left, stepping briskly forward instead of back.

"Can't teach him anything," Schlager reported wearily. Then he added, with a touch of admiration, "But he does drink like a true Legionnaire."

This was not exaggerated. Vyanor would drink anything and everything—wine, brandy, anisette, cordials, Pernod, perfumes, olive oil, vinegar, beer, syrups. When drunk, he liked to fight, and he attacked friends and strangers; but as he was considered by his comrades to be not wholly responsible, they saw that he came to no harm.

The captain commanding the company, old man Fourgues, was annoyed by the presence of this puzzling individual in his well organized outfit. In all his career in the Legion—he had been a private in the battalion stationed in Siam—he had never come across such a case. He suggested to the medical officer who came from Geryville that Vyanor be discharged as insane. The four-striped medico, who had a conscience, pointed out that he could not sign the man off as mad, when his real trouble was complete bewilderment at his surroundings and absolute ignorance of French.

"You understand my position, Captain? Nobody knows where to ship him, and should I declare him insane, he would be placed in an asylum somewhere and become a public charge. He has more than normal intelligence, you know. One may be quite impossible as a soldier and still be perfectly sane."

"Probably, probably," Fourgues grumbled. "How did he get in? What will they send us next?"

Time after time he had Vyanor brought into his office, to be confronted with all the men in the company who knew outlandish tongues and dialects. Once a Danish private thought he understood a few words in a long speech, but soon admitted himself as helpless as the others. Fourgues rid himself of the problem by shifting the burden to Ser-

geant Schlager, a tall, muscular, blond Luxemburger.

"I want him turned into a Legionnaire. How? Do I have to teach you your job as a sergeant? Either I see results within two weeks, or you'll hear from me."

There was no need to teach Vyanor how to take care of his arms. He was very proud of rifle and bayonet, and no man in the company spent a longer time cleaning them. But he was slack in the matter of dress, would forget to cover his head or to roll his puttees. He could not be taught to shoot, for he insisted on firing with both eyes open, handling the military rifle like a shotgun. What was surprising, he could hit almost anything up to a hundred and fifty yards. Beyond that, it was obvious that targets did not interest him.



SCHLAGER punished him with prison at first. But being sent to the lockup meant nothing to Vyanor, who would labor all day with the fatigue parties from the jail, sweat profusely, grin when he chanced to meet any one's glance, and go to his cell to sleep without appearing to feel anger, shame or humiliation.

"He just doesn't realize what is going on, Captain," Schlager protested. "The best thing is to keep him out of sight when the inspector is due and—"

"Enough! Make a Legionnaire of him. I don't want him puttering about rigged out like a clown. This is a company of Legion, not a circus. I hold you responsible."

"Captain, I'd have to—"

"Don't tell me, Sergeant. Act."

Therefore Schlager took Vyanor into a room for private instruction. He dressed him according to regulations. Then, standing a few steps away, beamed upon him, expressed extravagant satisfaction, clapped his hands.

"Good, Legionnaire, very good; nice!"

Vyanor's grin almost reached his ears. But the sergeant bent, removed his puttees, indicated the door. And when Vyanor tried to leave, the sergeant pointed at his nude shins, frowned.

"Bad! Very bad!"

And he slapped him smartly across

the face. Vyanor laughed, but struck back at the second blow. Schlager's ears rang with the impact of his cuffs; but he was aware that Vyanor considered the whole thing a game, and that striking a superior was a sin beyond his comprehension. Suddenly the private understood the reason for the punishment, rolled his puttees, adjusted his uniform, assured himself that all his buttons were fastened. Again Schlager smiled, patted his head. And from that day on Vyanor was meticulous in point of dress.

"Looks better," Fourgues admitted. "Now, introduce him to Legion snap—spirit. How? You keep asking how? Are you a sergeant or am I?"

Fortunately for Schlager, it was difficult to judge the results of this new undertaking. Was Vyanor conscious that Legionnaires were apart and above members of other units? Or did he deem all men who wore a uniform equals? This was doubtful; for even months later he would salute mounted policemen, mistaking them for officers, something few Legionnaires saw without deep shame. A member of the company saluting a cop!

He received no mail; no one ever inquired about him. But he was by no means dependent upon his pay for his comforts and pleasure. His comrades liked him, and dragged him to the narrow streets behind the native village. They reported that Vyanor, with a bottle of alcohol under his belt, was more fun than a show. In his own awkward way he could fight, and the civilian customers learned to avoid the small, yellow faced man on pay days, fifteenth and last days of the month. Not only could he handle men much larger and heavier than himself, but his comrades hovered near, ready to interfere and keep him from serious harm. Vyanor was popular and had become a sort of unofficial mascot.

Schlager made but few attempts to teach him how to throw a grenade. Vyanor could not understand the difference between a live missile and a dummy, held the first too long for comfort, tossed the other away clumsily, as if it burned his fingers. His rifle work did not improve; but the automatic rifle re-

mained for him a kind of fire-spouting idol of metal, which he worshiped from a safe distance.

But in small tasks, such as the making of beds, polishing of boots and belt buckles, cleaning of weapons, he showed remarkable talent. Soon the men in his room would not have surrendered him without a fight, for he did menial jobs for the entire squad. He much preferred furbishing steel or softening leather to joining the men in the yard for the evening chorus.

There were other reasons to esteem him. His resistance to fatigue and pain were astounding. He literally melted during his first march under the African sun, reached the goal with his boots oozing blood. But he was grinning, nodding, laughing and ready to start again, although his feet must have felt like pincushions.

His progress was at a standstill when the company received the order to march out, locate and disperse a strong band of Berber raiders, driven north from the frequented caravan lanes by the Camel Corps and reported not far from Bou Mighalt by the scouting planes. Schlager doubled to the captain's office before the bugles stopped sounding.

"Legionnaire Vyanor, Mathias, should be left here, Captain. He's willing, but he may cause confusion. Nobody knows what he is going to be like under fire."

"Vyanor comes with the rest," Captain Fourgues snapped. "My company starts out complete. Legionnaires must fight. Otherwise no purpose in having them. Perhaps the whistling of bullets will clear his head. Schlager, I hold you responsible. You had months to train him properly."

"I can't achieve miracles," Schlager grumbled—out of hearing.



BY A stroke of luck rare in that region, the company found the enemy where reported—and found him willing to make a stand at the crest of a long hill. There were about two hundred warriors, burning with rancor and shame because they had been driven off from the south without booty. They hoped

that a well fought combat against the Foreign Legion would prevent the population of their desert camps from laughing scornfully when they returned.

The khaki sections deployed and ascended the slope in leaps, halting at intervals to shake resistance with intense fire.

Schlager had taken care to leave Vyanor behind, with the reserve section and the mules of the ammunition train. But when automatic No. 3 signaled for cartridges and there was no one else available, Vyanor was given a case to take up the slope. He delivered it as instructed, for he understood elementary gestures. Then, instead of trotting back as he was presumed to do, he loitered near Schlager.

The crackling of rifle fire, the smell of powder, the sight of the automatics jerking with the ripping sounds of the bursts, like metal animals straining at a chain, fascinated him as always. Vyanor hopped from one foot to the other, too thrilled to think of his own danger. He could not be unaware of it, for he had been on the rifle range and had seen guns fired for over a year.

"Beat it, Vyanor—go away," Schlager pleaded.

"No, no! Here good, Sergeant, very good. Nice!"

"All right. Lie down, monkey-face."

Schlager indicated the spot, and Vyanor leaped to crouch between two Legionnaires on the firing line. He fired his rifle with both eyes open, shouting defiance at the top of his lungs, mingling recently acquired French and German epithets with his own mysterious tongue. As there was no panic in his tone, Schlager did not interfere. But he made the firm resolution that Vyanor would be tied and left with the baggage during the next engagement.

Within a few minutes the corporal near Vyanor was struck in the small of the back, flipped about like a cat with a broken spine. The little Legionnaire ran to him, picked him up, struggling and howling, and took him down the hill to the ambulance, just as he had seen several other men carried.

Schlager was relieved, believed himself rid of the chap; but Vyanor returned at the gallop, peered eagerly into the

sergeant's face for approval.

"Me good? Nice? Good?"

"Good, great big good!" Schlager was forced to admit.

Vyanor laughed like a small boy. He loaded and fired. It was obvious, even from Schlager's position, that he was doing no harm to the enemy, for the muzzle of his rifle was pointed fifteen feet above the rim of the hill. The sergeant feared now that the fool's stentorian shouts would draw fire in his own direction.

A private was hit some distance down the line, his throat slit by a ricochet. Reason told him that he was mortally wounded and instinct drove him to flee from his unavoidable fate. Springing to his feet, both hands clutching at his neck, he sped madly, like a chicken fleeing the chopping block. Blood spurted between his fingers. As he passed by, men reached out, tried to bring him down and out of the way. His crazy lurchings were throwing the whole section into confusion.

At last he stumbled over the thick barrel of the automatic rifle nearest Vyanor. He fell headlong, writhed, clawing and kicking. His palms gripped the searing hot metal tube; his blood smoked, flaked and stank. The gunner, struck in the belly by a flying boot, collapsed. Feeder No. 1, hit in the face, fell back. A mad scene followed, men and gun whirling in a rising cloud of steam and sand dust.

"*Bon sang!* Get that automatic into action, there," Fourgues clamored.

Schlager leaped to obey, but some one was before him—Vyanor. There was something fanatical in his rush, in the expression on his usually placid face. The automatic was interfered with; that small god of metal had been touched by a stranger! For Vyanor had noticed that the men in charge of automatics resented other Legionnaires' handling their guns.

His hands closed on the wounded man's harness-straps; he hauled him away, fell with him. Then he held him long enough for the gun to be cleared. The man died in his arms, after a last struggle. And Vyanor, seeing the enemy coming down on the Legion line, calmly fixed bayonet.

But the automatic had resumed firing. The natives realized that the confusion in the Europeans' line, which had appeared an opportunity, was over. They broke and fled, and while two sections occupied the crest of the hill to hasten their flight with regular bursts, the wounded were taken to the ambulance.

Vyanor was treated for burns received from the automatic and for a long flesh wound in his thigh. He was as excited, as voluble, as if he had drunk a whole quart of his favorite *raki*. Patently, regardless of other shortcomings, he belonged in the Legion; for if any man had ever enjoyed fighting Vyanor was that man.

Captain Fourgues cited him. But Vyanor was given his bronze cross privately, every one fearing that if he were allowed to participate in an official ceremony he would have a lapse of behavior which would make the company the laughing-stock of the Corps. As it happened, the decorating of Vyanor threw another burden on Sergeant Schlager. The Legionnaire did not connect what he had done on the day of combat with a cross received several weeks later, and merely thought that he had acquired the right to adorn his breast as others did.

His comrades discovered this very soon, supplied him with badges and ribbons, sought more for him. It was not rare to behold Vyanor wearing the Tunisian Nicham on one side of his cross and the Academic Palms or Agricultural Merit on the other.

"Laughing-stock for civilians," Captain Fourgues told Schlager. "Hold you responsible next time it happens."



THE sergeant took the only possible measure, and transferred the guardianship of Vyanor to his orderly, a taciturn, powerful Pole, who kept him nearby as instructed or saw that he was deprived of fancy badges when he went for a stroll in town. As a consequence Vyanor was about the sergeant's quarters constantly, and the two grew very fond of each other.

At odd moments, Schlager taught the private to read cards, which appeared

much easier than teaching French. Vyanor rapidly became a player to be reckoned with; but when the type of game was shifted, it was very hard for him to admit a change in the relative values of the pasteboards. It took several weeks and much argument to convince him that at *belote*, for instance, a nine spot could beat an ace.

Vyanor was spared test marches and many duties, for he seemed more affected by the Summer's heat than others. During his leisure he acquired sidelines; he learned to repair boots and harness, to sew buttons, to cook. He was counted among the picturesque characters in the company, and came to mind when an inspection or a parade was due.

"Does Vyanor march by with us, or do we stick him on the sick list?"

The sick list invariably was selected, for Captain Fourgues lived in dread that a general would pick Vyanor out for some of the kindly questions asked Legionnaires.

By Fall he had mastered all of three hundred words of French, and could tell haltingly of certain of his activities in the past. But he could not name the country he came from, and an important word was obviously lacking in his vocabulary to describe something he attempted to explain by piling sand, then throwing it into the air in handfuls, after pointing at the sky and next at his shirt.

Captain Fourgues, witnessing one of these demonstrations, had a ready solution:

"The story of creation: Man made from dust by a Power in the sky Who provides nourishment and clothing. The poor chap probably wishes us to understand that he is not a heathen."

Schlager was skeptical, and became particularly so when he noticed that his chief, seeing Vyanor gesturing to indicate his own wanderings on ships and ashore, insisted that the signs represented the flight of Cain or the construction of the Ark. Meanwhile, the scribe who aspired to become a criminologist noted the sounds uttered by Vyanor phonetically and sent copies to various institutions of learning in Europe. He received voluminous reports

in return, and could have selected whatever he desired, from purest North American Dakota to dialects of Tartary.



LATE in the Autumn the company received orders to leave Bou Mighalt, to proceed to Mekmin-el-Arish, where a new post had been erected by the engineers. Captain Fourgues weeded out the unwanted, preparing to ask for a replacement draft.

"Here's our chance to get rid of Vyanor," he told Schlager.

"He's well liked in the company, Captain." The sergeant hesitated; then confessed. "I like him myself. I hate to think of what would happen to him in a new company. In another six months, in a year at the most, he'll be as good as anybody, save for marksmanship."

"You're soft as a woman, Schlager," Fourgues said severely. "All right, I won't let common sense interfere with sentimentality. He comes with us. But you're responsible."

"Surely, Captain. I'll bear that in mind."

Vyanor took intense interest in the preparations for departure. The cooks gave him a number of remnants, and he scraped the bottoms of lard tubs and jam buckets with equal relish. On the eve of the march he went to the native village with the others, got copiously drunk and fought two Arabs at once. For he was growing aware of his standing as a Legionnaire, scorned odds against him and tackled what offered.

He took his place in formation the next morning with one eye blackened, his lips swollen, but completely sobered. He stepped forward left foot first when the bugles blared after the preliminary brassy flourishes. And he made the familiar sounds of mock farewell to the Arab girls who had crowded by the gate to bid their friends a safe journey.

The dusty trail across the flat plain opened for him as for the rest, and the company headed for Mekmin-el-Arish, fifty kilometers away. The march was scheduled to be covered in two laps, with a *grande halte* and camping in the open on the first night.

The weather was very clear, the sky a limpid blue. The air was cool, crisp.

There were many Legionnaires in the company who hailed from mountainous countries—Swiss, Bavarians, Austrians—and they seemed intoxicated by the keen atmosphere. They sang at the top of their lungs, stopping only to curse the country and its debilitating, torrid Summer. Vyanor shared the excitement, darted from the ranks, threw handfuls of sand high in the air, pointing at the sky, blowing out his cheeks with a hissing sound.

"Sergeant—good, very good, too good—soon!"

"Wait until you have thirty kilometers in those bandy legs of yours, monkey-mug," Schlager warned him, "then come and tell me just how good you feel."

His tone was gruff, bantering, but his glance followed Vyanor with almost paternal solicitude. He knew that throughout the march the strange little man would clown about like a gnome, caper, steal hair from the mules' tails to tress into bracelets, cram his canvas bags with cast off, empty tins until some one forced him to lighten cargo.

When Bou Mighalt was a few hours behind, Schlager noticed that Captain Fourgues appeared uneasy. He reined his horse to talk with the lieutenant and sub-lieutenant, both rather young men and new to the country. Then all three would consult pocket instruments and peer at the sky. Before long gossip wafted the subject of the conferences to the last man in the last row.

"Fourgues is afraid of a snowstorm."

Schlager did not smile. He had seen storms on the High Plateau before. The region rises over four thousand feet in altitude, offers a flat, unbroken surface to the wind. Years before, a company of the Foreign Legion had been caught in the open by a formidable blizzard and, after the blow had abated, the bodies of the men had been found, scattered for miles. Somehow, the proximity of the Sahara, less than six hours away by rail, made men forget this.

The captain was tempted to turn back, but he was afraid of appearing ridiculous if the snowstorm failed to materialize.

Schlager recalled Vyanor's broken words, his odd behavior, and knew the

truth in a flash. The man needed no pocket instruments to foretell the weather. A storm was coming up, bringing snow, and the little Legionnaire felt it. The sergeant doubled to join the captain and give him the information.

"So—your pet feels snow?" Fourgues lifted his brows. He did not hold a high opinion of Vyanor. "That's interesting, of course. But what makes you think his hunch is any better than yours or mine, not to be too modest?"

"Well, Captain, he tosses sand, points at the sky, then at his shirt, the way he used to do. I get his meaning now. Shirt stands for white. Something white dropping from the sky—snow. Probably comes from someplace where they get a lot of snow and knows how to tell when it's coming by looking at the sky."

"I thought I had told you what he meant by such gestures," the officer replied. "I understand the primitive mind and its expressions rather well. Five years among the Muongs and four among the Sakalaves, remember! If a snowstorm comes—" he hesitated, and Schlager felt that the captain was seeking some one or something to bear responsibility. But Fourgues ended quickly, "Let it come. We'll see soon enough."



YET he cut the noon halt short to enable the company to reach a sheltered spot, selected on the map, by twilight. The march had not been resumed thirty minutes when the sun vanished.

The entire sky had turned to a dull, gunmetal hue. The layers of atmosphere nearer the earth seemed to turn into a visible, blue-gray haze, while a cold wind whistled flush with the ground, lashing harshly at exposed skin. The whole plateau was alive with the fierce, icy blast of air; the earth seemed to scream; and a sensation of approaching doom was aroused in the boldest.

Captain Fourgues lifted his hand, and the other officers ran toward him. Then, after listening to his words, they trotted down the files, passing the word that should the wind increase in violence, if rain or snow started to fall, the men were to hold on to each other and that

no one was permitted to leave the ranks for any purpose.

Schlager looked at the sky, and saw nothing but the immense bellies of dense, black clouds. Something of the concern agitating the officers gripped him. The men, softened by the long, broiling Summer, would be susceptible, sensitive to cold, utterly unprepared to cope with the emergency. No storm had been expected so early in the season, and the heavy garments had gone with the supplies to Mekmin-el-Arish.

At three o'clock the company tramped in semi-darkness, while invisible, minute sleety fragments swept from the leaden sky, biting into faces and hands. Many among the Legionnaires hailed this first snow with yells of joy.

"We'll have a white Christmas, fellows!"

"Eh, I'll take photos and send them home! My folks think we're living in the tropics."

"Doesn't this air taste good?"

The captain's whistle slashed through the shouts, and the men became silent, formed a square. Fourgues addressed the massed sections from the saddle.

"Legionnaires, a snowstorm is upon us. I don't know how severe it will be. But the danger is real. A company of our regiment was annihilated in just such a storm, not fifty kilometers from here. I was with those who picked up the corpses. The men had scattered. I want discipline to prevail. Let there be no panic, no dashes for individual safety. Your officers and noncoms have orders! We shall try to reach the spot selected for the evening halt, where we can camp in a ravine. Sergeants, I hold you responsible for the behavior of your men. Forward—march!"

A few minutes later it seemed to Schlager that the air had become unbearably thick and warm, and he found breathing difficult. Then white flakes drifted down slowly, until the whole horizon was a moving white screen.

The men swiftly turned into vague, white silhouettes. Collars were turned up, buttoned snugly. No one showed concern as yet. All knew that Captain Fourgues never lost an opportunity to make a dramatic speech, and in their pleasure at seeing snow again, they had

forgotten the numbing effect of treacherous cold, and the fact that the company might lose its way. The majority, even those from cold climates, had little conception of how violent a storm could become on this nude stretch, bereft of shelters, freely swept by the winds.

The blast increased brutally. The snow spun and whirled in a blinding cloud. Progress was difficult very soon, for the smaller stones were masked and the whitened shrubs merged with the white soil so completely that men's boots caught in them unexpectedly. Men stumbled, fell headlong, rose cursing and sore, nursing bruised heads and palms.

Often an officer would grope his way down the files, grasping a moist sleeve here and there, shouting—

"Keep together, keep together!"

There were moments when the snow struck horizontally, like a million icy arrows, cutting into eyes and mouths. Schlager's uneasiness increased. The danger which had seemed improbable but an hour ago was impending. He thought of that other company, composed of men just as hardy, as brave, and which had scattered before the blast. He understood why now. A few hours of this, and the men would lose moral strength with the coming of fatigue.

"Keep together, keep together!"

"All right, Lieutenant."

Twice the whistles blew for the hourly halt of ten minutes. The first time the men rolled snowballs, engaged in mock battle. But at the second pause the novelty had worn off and they were content to huddle quietly. They were beginning to think: The supplies, which had left on motor trucks two days before, were awaiting them at Mekmin-el-Arish. No firewood had been brought along, and it was out of the question to gather it on the way now, as was the ordinary routine. They could look forward, at best, to a cold supper and an uncomfortable night.

At the third halt the officers met. The lieutenant was of the opinion that the company should turn about and return to Bou Mighalt. Captain Fourgues said that a fresh effort must be made to reach the camping place, which could not be far away. Many caught his

words, torn from his lips by the wind.

"Find shelter—sufficient food—night's rest— Can't last—extraordinary event—responsibility not involved—"

The sky cleared awhile, late in the afternoon; but the wind grew colder. Men shivered, suffering already from chapped faces and swelling hands. They turned their reddened eyes, their moist, shining noses, toward Captain Fourgues, as if trying to discern whether the officer knew his whereabouts better than they did. The immense white blanket over the countryside had covered all landmarks. Small trees had been blown down by the violent gusts, and the outlines of boulders familiar to all had been altered by drifts of snow. The plateau they remembered, glistening in a burning, tawny spread, resembled a Siberian steppe.



THE sub-lieutenant had brought out his pocket compass, and the three officers were bending over it, peering at the map which Schlager held flat against the flank of the captain's horse.

"Where are we?"

"How long have we been walking?"

They argued at length. The lieutenant climbed to the saddle, stood upon it, scanning the horizon with glasses. He claimed to identify the Zaid Boulders on his right, when they should have been on the left. Schlager was impatient at their bickerings, until he realized with a start that he, who had gone over every mile of the region for over a year, could not be sure of what he saw, so much had the snow altered the aspect of things.

"Let's be frank," Fourgues said. "We're lost. Of course, it can't be helped. No one expected a severe storm this early in the season. But we must make a decision, however."

"Yes," the lieutenant agreed. "It's starting to snow again."

Tiny flakes drifted down lazily.

In contrast with the brilliant sun of the morning, the sinister, opaque sky was awe inspiring. Once more the isolated flakes increased, became streaks of white, slanting more and more as the wind resumed its mournful shrieking.

In a well settled country, with villages at intervals of a few miles, with

roadside inns and isolated farms, the danger would have been small. But here a false lead might send the company in a direction where no human dwelling could be found for two to three hundred miles.

The sub-lieutenant, perhaps more sensible than his seniors, suggested throwing all vain pride aside and marching due east, until they reached the railroad tracks of the Oran-Kenadza line.

"Fifty kilometers at least," Captain Fourgues objected, "then probably fifty more to the nearest station. I don't want to seem an absolute ass, either. The next time the sky clears, we'll probably find out where we are by some landmark or other. And we may stumble into a native encampment where we can get guides."

"Arab guides? Not used to snow any more than we are."

"Right. Do we march on?"

"We march! Southwest," Fourgues insisted.

He blew his whistle; the sections moved on again. They plunged endlessly into the whirling snow. Night came, and they were kept marching. And when the sky cleared there was no moon. The stars glittered for a few minutes and vanished.

"Keep together, keep together—"

The Legionnaires shuffled monotonously in the thick, cold, moist darkness. Schlager, who had a good idea of the distances separating various points of the vicinity, knew that they had missed the intended shelter for the night. According to compass and stars, they were marching in the general direction of Mekmin-el-Arish, but it was quite probable that they had swung many miles north or south.

The snow fell constantly after that. By nine o'clock several men had suffered leg injuries from slips or falls, and were riding on the ammunition train's mules. At ten, during the hourly halt, two red rockets were fired, in the hope that Mekmin-el-Arish might see them and send up an answering signal.

Even allowing for time lost because of poor footing, it was estimated that between thirty-five and forty kilometers had been covered. Unless the company was altogether lost, Mekmin-el-Arish

could not be far off. Again the lieutenant stood on the saddle and scanned the sky with his glasses.

"Nothing," he announced, sliding to the ground.

The men were ordered to eat bread, cheese and sardines, which were carried in the bags. Wine and alcohol were distributed.

"Better wait here until morning," the sub-lieutenant suggested.

Schlager saw Fourgues shrug. Immobility meant mental surrender, while movement cheered up the men with an illusion that they were on the way to safety and comfort. The captain tried to hide his thought by saying in a glib, unconcerned tone:

"Keep going until we reach some sort of shelter. Exposure would be severe. Lead to pneumonia, bronchitis, lung troubles. March!"

And the aimless, monotonous shuffling was resumed. The cold had reached many of the men, whose teeth chattered audibly. A few of the bolder spirits tried to jest, sang "Under The Burning African Sun," the hit ballad of the Riff War. But the bulk remained apathetic, depressed.

"We're circling. That's where we halted at five o'clock!"

Schlager never knew who uttered those words first. But all understood they were true. A sort of dumb panic swept the company. For a few minutes the sergeants had to shove their men about, in some cases to strike them to keep them in the ranks. Those Legionnaires were undergoing something new, passing through a situation in which cohesion and discipline availed nothing. And each one was certain that if left to pick his own trail he knew where warmth and shelter could be found.

The excitement died out with surprising rapidity. The soldiers were mute. Schlager himself suffered from cold; his legs felt numb from the knees down. Some of the men marched with their eyes closed, half asleep, burdened by invincible fatigue. One fell, had to be shaken awake, prodded with fists to drive him on again. All the mules bore additional burdens, for twisted ankles, wrenched knees were more and more frequent. The march was turning into

a debacle. Before long, some one would be left behind; and with this break in morale, others would yield to fate, drop by the wayside. That was probably what had happened in that other company, years ago.

Shortly after midnight Captain Fourgues called a halt. The men dropped in their tracks, waited under the snow.

"No use going on," the chief admitted grudgingly. "We'd be there by now, had we gone in the right direction. We're lost. We have to make the best of it. See that the men have all the comforts that can be arranged for them."



LANTERNS were lighted.

The officers circulated, trying to cheer their men with vague explanations. Sergeants shook those who had fallen asleep; orders were given to clear the ground of snow with the entrenching tools carried on the packs. But the falling snow gave them no respite. The soil was hard, wet, cold. Schlager knew that this would be the beginning of the end. But what else was there to do? If kept on the march without definite hope for a few hours longer, the men would break. Already one could sense the solid sections disintegrating. This was not a human danger; there was no foe to combat save that soft, oozing snow, falling relentlessly.

Vyanor, who had been tramping with the others, appeared to help Schlager's orderly set up the small tent. When the little Legionnaire understood that the company was about to camp for the night, he grunted his disapproval.

"Bad, bad—" he declared. "Sergeant, sleep here, no good. Too much—" he groped in vain for the word "cold", which he had never heard in all probability, and expressed himself by chattering his teeth loudly. "Brrr-brrr! No good sleep here. Go house. Sleep here—men sick—dead!"

"Shut up, monkey-mug," Schlager retorted.

He did not need to be told the danger of the night in the open, with the sharp cold that would come in the morning. He pictured the numbed, discouraged men staggering on and on, circling, until all had dropped.

"No good. No sleep here—house—house!" Vyanor insisted, pulling the sergeant's sleeve. Schlager tried to push him away, but the Legionnaire clung, and spoke rapidly in broken French. "Men dead! No good, go house, soon."

"We're lost," Schlager explained. He swept his arms widely, peered about, lifted his brows in puzzlement. "Where? Get it? Lost? We know nothing Bou Mighalt! Here? No know. Mekmin-el-Arish? No know. Know nowhere. Sleep here. Find in morning. Get that?"

"No sleep. Walk."

"Walk where?"

In the light of the nearby lantern, the sergeant saw Vyanor's eyes gleam with understanding. The little man grinned.

"Walk to house."

"You know where house is?"

"Bou Mighalt there—" Vyanor lifted his arm without hesitation, indicated the northeast. Then he indicated a spot due west. "We go house get bad water—plenty tree?" Schlager understood that the Legionnaire was trying to identify their goal in his own mind, and nodded. Mekmin-el-Arish was near a grove of trees, and the water in the wells tasted badly from the presence of niter in the soil. Vyanor grinned cheerfully.

"There. House we go find."

"How far?" Schlager asked. "Walk much? Walk a little?"

"Walk a little much—one soup, one snack. Not two soup."

The sergeant decoded this by guessing that Vyanor measured time by meals. The space between a meal, or "soup" as it is called in the Legion, and a light repast, a snack, meant three to four hours. An unreasoning trust filled him. He grasped Vyanor's arm and led him before the captain.

"This man knows where we are, Captain. He says it's about three hours' march to Mekmin-el-Arish."

"What makes him think so?"

"I don't quite know. But when he manages to say anything, he's usually right. Remember, he said the snow was coming before any one else knew."

The officers, after a discussion, shrugged.

"Three hours?" Fourgues was ready to clutch at any hope by this time. He mused awhile, decided suddenly. "All

right! Get the men ready, we're going on. But he's responsible, I'm telling you. He'll find out that he can't joke with me!"

The men were so discouraged that they had to be urged to pack again. The bizarre torpor brought about by cold gripped them, and they were unwilling to make an effort to save themselves. The sergeants screamed their orders, applied cuffs and boots when needed, shoved the files into some sort of order.

"Come on, forward—march! Come on, we're getting there now. Come on, the Legion!"

Schlager was worried. After all, Vyanor might be mistaken, for how could any one feel sure of the way in this storm? Should the improvised guide fail, all would blame the sergeant. Popularity is a delicate thing in the army, and the noncom was gambling a great deal on his blind, instinctive faith in the yellow lad. A great deal? He smiled grimly. If Vyanor was right, he won. If he was wrong, Schlager would be beyond blame, and no one would be left to blame him!

"Go Mekmin-el-Arish, Vyanor, house with bad water."

"Good, Sergeant. Good—little walk now."

The small Legionnaire took the lead, and the whole company followed, men groaning, cursing sleepily, miserable with cold and fatigue. Captain Fourgues was on foot, having surrendered his horse to two new casualties. The march seemed to last interminably. Shouts of the noncoms grew hoarser, the sound of slaps came more and more frequently, spaced by the rattle of mess kits and bayonet scabbards when men dropped out.

"Pick him up! Shake him—rub snow in his face. He's all right. Steady there, we're getting home—"

After three and a half hours Vyanor stopped.

"Look—house. Good, nice?"

Through the thick flakes Schlager discerned a weak, yellowish glow—a lantern!

"A light—a light," he called out.

A dozen men distinguished the light at the same time. The whole company was galvanized, strode faster, while a joyous

clamor and bursts of song rose from the harassed ranks.

"It's Mekmin-el-Arish!" the captain decided.

He ordered a red rocket fired, and an answering flare curved high into the stormy sky. And at 4:30 the wearied sections passed through the gateway. The men broke ranks and rushed to the kitchens, where soup was ladled from enormous, simmering caldrons. Loaves of bread were tossed into outstretched hands. The canteen, reopened, was crowded to the door with steaming, merry, thirsting men.

Vyanor ate ravenously, was treated by the captain, the officers, Schlager and a dozen others. Finally he fell asleep on a table in a corner of the canteen. Kind hands unlaced his boots. Blankets were piled on the floor, and the man who had saved the company was laid carefully upon them. For the time being, Vyanor had become a king. Later he was considered a sort of hero who could do no wrong.

The lost company had been reported wandering in the storm. Many Algerian newspapers had featured the story, and this odd item of a detachment of soldiers risking death from cold a few hundred kilometers from the Sahara had caught the attention of the French press. Legionnaire Vyanor received letters of congratulation, gifts, money and the medal for life saving!

Captain Fourgues was as proud of him as if he had discovered him, reared him carefully for the very purpose he had achieved. In an expansive mood he declared:

"We have everything needed, in the Legion. There is no emergency that finds us unprepared!"

He exempted Vyanor of all patrols, all marches, assigned him as a sort of orderly for the noncoms' mess, which enabled the Legionnaire to live most of his existence in or near the kitchens. By Spring Vyanor was as fat as a quail, and his uniforms had to be let out. As Mekmin-el-Arish was far from supervised towns, no one interfered with Vyanor's love for wearing fancy badges and ribbons; and his peculiar passion for collecting various metal objects was encouraged.



A FEW days after he had been awarded the stripe of first class Legionnaire, a staff automobile rolled into the yard, slid to a stop before the low building of the company's office. An orderly came on the run to order Schlager to find and bring in Vyanor. This was easy, needing only a visit to the supply sheds. And the sergeant ushered his protégé into the office.

There was a strange scene. The small, khaki clad man literally leaped into the arms of a tall, rangy, black bearded Frenchman, who wore a monocle and was obviously a man of considerable importance, judging from the red rosette on his coat. Vyanor was almost in tears, and the tall gentleman seemed but little less moved.

By evening everybody knew the newcomer's name—Valenor, the famous explorer! And the truth about Vyanor came out. The Legionnaire known as Vyanor had been born in the wastes of Greenland. Dr. Valenor, during one of his trips undertaken for the Geographical Society of France, had employed him as a hunter and guide. He had taken him to France for a visit, as a partial reward for his splendid service, his extraordinary good humor under adverse circumstances.

The rest of the poor chap's adventures were easily surmised. He had wandered from his protector's home, located near Nantes, and had gone into the city. There he had bought drink until befuddled or broke. After roaming the streets, unable to find his way back through the town, he had entered military headquarters. Seeing this odd man, who knew no French yet manifestly sought something, the clerks had sent him into the recruiting office.

Unable to explain, ready to obey any suggestion, he had made his mark on the paper offered him without protest. When he had tried to speak of his chief, Monsieur Valenor, some bored scribe had written down "Mathias Vyanor." Warned in advance never to resist men wearing uniforms while in France, he had allowed himself to be shunted this way and that until he had reached Algeria. Unable to read or write, not knowing even the name of the city in

which he had been lost, there had been nothing for him to do but board trains and steamers as instructed. Meanwhile, Valenor had sought for him in vain, never thinking to inquire at the recruiting office.

Returning from an expedition, Valenor had picked up a newspaper, read of the company's long march through the storm, and had been haunted by the similarity of names. Inquiries at Sidi bel Abbes had revealed date and city of enlistment, and he had come immediately to retrieve his guide.

When asked to explain Vyanor's marvelous sense of direction, Valenor smiled. There was no scientific explanation to be given. An Eskimo found his way across the waste, in any weather, by the identical instinct guiding migrating birds, geese, ducks, swallows.

Valenor desired to send his friend home, for Vyanor had a family. Arrangements were made with Sidi bel Abbes to release Legionnaire Vyanor, Mathias, on leave of absence from the Corps, pending investigation of his case.

On the day scheduled for his departure, the whole company turned out to escort him; and the jazz orchestra, organized by a German corporal, played him to the waiting automobile outside the walls. And it was then that the little fellow understood that he was parting from his friends forever.

He embraced Sergeant Schlager, who was not wholly undisturbed himself, rubbed his cheeks against those of his tutor in the Legion. And—a bewildering phenomenon—the cheerful chap shed large tears.

"You go visit your folks," Schlager tried to console him. "Then you come back and finish your enlistment. Get that? Legion? Enlistment?"

"Good, good!" Vyanor sobbed.

"Goodby, old man!"

"Goodby—" Vyanor shook hands with all present. The captain, in an impulsive gesture, presented him with the badge of the Dragon of Annam, long coveted. Valenor pulled his friend down into the seat, gave the signal to start. The car slid away.

But Vyanor rose a last time, waved his arms, and all heard him shout:

"Good Legion! Good Legionnaire!"

The SAGA of the SIXSHOOTER

(V ~ Cartridge Revolvers)

By CARL ELMO FREEMAN

AFTER the Civil War the country was flooded with cap-and-ball sixshooters. Colts, Starrs, Remingtons and others that could be readily altered to take the new metal cartridges were in demand. Colt's heavy caliber revolvers continued to be the favorite of the plainsmen, trappers and guides of the Far West. In loading their cylinders they poured melted buffalo tallow in on top of the seated bullet and thus materially reduced the fouling of the barrel. Daniel Wesson utilized this idea by lubricating the bullet of the .32 short cartridge which he used in his tip-up revolver.

About 1861 W. C. Dodge invented an ejecting device for a break-open revolver. But, being an employee of the Patent Office, he could not secure a patent. So he resigned and was issued a patent in 1865; he sold it to Smith & Wesson. They then made a .32 short, center-fire, in a break-open pattern with this ejector, a model which was manufactured for nearly 30 years.

Daniel Wesson experimented with the idea in a large caliber gun and turned out an Army size in a rim-fire cartridge of .46 caliber, with the bullet dipped in a lubricant. Russia gave Smith & Wesson a contract to supply her army with these revolvers in a rim-fire .46 short. But it was discovered that the lubricant on the bullets chipped and pulverized at low temperatures, and the cartridge was changed to a center-fire with inside lubrication and called .44 caliber, although the diameter of the shell and bullet remained the same as the .46 short, which is .455. This is the famous .44 Russian cartridge, still popular today—and explains why it is oversize. The Smith & Wesson people were protected by the Rollin White patent covering the open-

end, or bored-through, cylinder. But this patent expired in 1873.

In the meantime the Colt people were anxiously watching the trend of events and, just as soon as the White patent was declared dead, they put a new Colt sixshooter on the market. It was a single-action revolver, caliber .45 center-fire, in two patterns—the Cavalry model with 7½-inch barrel and the Artillery model with 5½-inch barrel. This is possibly the most famous of all revolvers, and is known as the "Peacemaker". Adopted by the United States Army in 1875, it was used throughout the Spanish War.

The Winchester Repeating Arms Company had improved on the Henry rifle. It was a lever action with King's improvement, using a caliber .44 center-fire cartridge. So that a man might have his rifle and sixshooter of the same caliber, and only have to carry one size ammunition, the new Colt was chambered to carry this new Winchester cartridge. This is known as the Frontier model.

Just as soon as these new cartridge sixshooters appeared in the West, plainsmen, Indian fighters, scouts and prospectors fell in love with them. Such men as Wild Bill Hickok, Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Luke Short, Neal Brown and others of their ilk hung up their old cap-and-ball revolvers and literally took these new sixshooters under their wing. And the Colt Frontier sixshooter is still the favorite revolver of the cowboy.

Hickok's guns, up to this time, were a pair of Colt Navy cap-and-ball .36's, and the pair of .44's with ivory handles presented to him by Vice-President Henry Wilson in 1869 after a five-week hunting trip in Kansas. Besides such heavy artillery, Wild Bill carried a pair

of .41 colt derringers in his pants pockets for emergency.

Remington brought out a .44 caliber sixshooter very similar to the Colt Frontier to sell for twelve dollars. It was an accurate, well finished gun, and should have sold like hotcakes. But people thought the cheap price indicated that it was a cheaply made gun. Had it been priced at the same level, or not more than a dollar under the Colt, it is very possible this gun would have shared the great popularity of the Colt today.

Merwin Hulbert & Company produced a large caliber revolver, but it was not well balanced; a few of the Lefacheux pin-fires and the Spanish Oviedo's had been brought in during the war; but revolvers of foreign manufacture did not appeal to the American mind.

No breach loading, double-action revolvers of American make had yet appeared.

In 1877 the Colt people brought out their double-action revolver with the hawk-bill handles. The first was in .38 and .41 calibers. Then they made it in .44 and .45 calibers. The heavier calibers were built with a solid frame, including the stock straps and were meant for heavy duty. They sold for twenty dollars. Jessie James carried two of these .45's. And he was killed with one of his own guns, the right, when Bob Ford shot him from behind at Saint Joseph, Missouri.

In the .38 and .41 caliber models the stock straps and trigger guard were in two pieces and held to the frame by five screws. The mechanism was rather complicated and endowed with flat springs, bent at acute angles, which broke rather easily. They sold for sixteen and fifteen dollars.

In spite of the fact that the double action could be fired more rapidly than the single action, the West generally did not take to these guns. The Westerner preferred the old single-action Peace-maker and Frontier sixshooters. Billy the Kid, however, had a small hand, and carried the .41 model.

In 1880 Smith & Wesson came out with their double-action break-open, in .44 center-fire, which they called their Navy model. This was used by our Navy and various foreign armies. They

also made a .32 and .38 in a slightly different type. These guns in the shorter barrel lengths were very popular as pocket pistols.

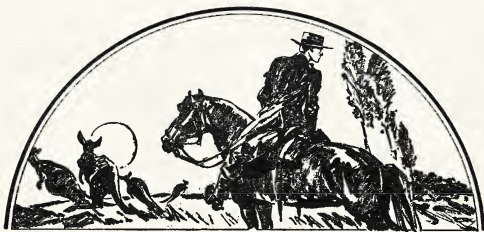
All this time inventors had been attempting to develop a side-swing cylinder mechanism to compete with the W. C. Dodge ejecting device on the Smith & Wesson. Hopkins & Allen, who were the Ford people in the revolver field, concentrated on the idea. They had been making dependable firearms at remarkably low prices. And about this time they perfected a side-swing .32 caliber revolver. Then Colt came along with a side-swing, double-action, in the .38 long Colt.

Smith & Wesson produced their justly famous New Departure, hammerless model, double-action, with the safety lever in the back grip. This is probably the most popular pocket revolver ever manufactured. It was introduced in 1887. Over five hundred thousand have been sold, and not a single accidental discharge has been reported.

As the idea of small-bore arms for the Army was gaining recognition, an ordinance board called for revolvers in the .38 caliber to be tested for their fitness as the Army weapon. Smith & Wesson entered their hammerless, and Colt entered the side-swing model, both in caliber .38. The Colt was declared more suitable for military use and in 1894 it was adopted by the War Department.

Smith & Wesson developed a very similar arm, chambered for the .38 Smith & Wesson special cartridge, the bullet of which gave a tighter fit in the barrel; and their gun was more accurate than the Colt. The War Department adopted it with the Colt as a regulation arm.

These two guns were used during the Spanish War, and sent with our troops to the Philippines. But there our soldiers discovered that a .38 bullet would not stop a blood-crazed Moro swinging a machete in both hands. The Krag rifle was doing the business at long range, but at short range the .38's were falling down, and the crazy Moro stayed on his feet long enough to chop somebody up. So the War Department called those old, retired .45's back into service and sent them over there to do the work. And they did it.



Continuing

The BROAD ARROW

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

The Story Thus Far:

WHEN Victoria Day, daughter of a major serving on the Australian prison labor board, saw by accident the convict, John Haxon, tied up to the whipping rack aboard the prison ship *Success* anchored in Sydney harbor, she fainted, crying out in horror the name Geoffrey Blake. Mary McQueen, a friend who had accompanied her out to the ship, recalled that Victoria had been in love with young Blake back in England, before he mysteriously dropped from sight.

Against Captain Henry Killough's wishes, Major Day demanded a private interview with Haxon. Killough lamely explained that the repeated floggings Haxon had undergone on his ship had been because he was a dangerous criminal, deported for murder, who was constantly inciting other prisoners to revolt.

Haxon denied that he was Geoffrey Blake when Major Day questioned him. He admitted that he had known Killough years before in school; and said that some day he would pay him off for the inhuman cruelties he had endured aboard the *Success*. To avert possible trouble, the major had Haxon transferred to McQuirk's station in the interior, a short distance from the home of Mary McQueen.

One night Haxon stole a blanket for a sick lad named Denis Roberts, and Major McQuirk sentenced each to twenty-five lashes hard. Haxon knew the boy could not survive the beating, and volunteered to take a double sentence. McQuirk

suspected some trick, and penned a note to the nearby Magistrate Woods to the effect that the bearer was to be given fifty lashes.

On the way to the Woods station, Haxon met a treacherous convict named Oakes, who had been Killough's flogger on the *Success*. Haxon tricked Oakes—who could not read—into taking the message on to the magistrate, delighted at the opportunity to pay off an old score.

A short time after Oakes departed, a girl cantered along the path Haxon was following. It was Mary McQueen. At her cry, "Geoffrey Blake!" Haxon laughed sneeringly and told her she was wrong. But Mary McQueen, who hated the prevailing penal system, persisted in talking with him until she got the story of the stolen blanket. She promised to do what she could to help the sick boy.

A few weeks later Haxon escaped. With two chosen men—Burke and Robbins—he made off into the bush after wounding Major McQuirk. And thereafter began to drift in to the settlements stories of a new bushranger whose daring holdups put to shame the efforts of such famous outlaws as the Jewboy and Jack Lynch.

One day an expensively dressed horseman galloped up to the station of Jim Stuart. The sheepman had seen the convict Haxon once before in the chains of a road gang—had heard Mary McQueen talk of him. He recognized his "flash" visitor immediately.

"I'd like to congratulate the latest sensation

of the bush," he said sarcastically. "The outlaw who never murders his victims like this other ruffian, Jack Lynch."

"Lynch is a fool and won't last three months longer," Haxon retorted easily. "But don't mistake me, my friend. You can be sure that I will kill quickly enough when the time comes."

STUART did not push his point. He took up another.

"You're wrong when you say nobody ever befriended you. I wonder if you know how much Miss McQueen did for you. She and I are friends, and she told me about meeting you. She not only saved your friend, the sick lad, but she used all her influence with Major McQuirk to help you, too."

The bushranger's immobile face did not betray a flicker of interest in this information. He brushed it aside as of no importance.

"Since you've mentioned the sick boy Roberts—what about him? Is he getting better?"

"He isn't the same man. He scarcely coughs at all. Miss McQueen sees that he drinks milk and has good food."

"It will pay," the outlaw said. "She'll get more work out of him in the end."

"That's not why she is doing it, and you know it."

Haxon shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not a ladies' man, Mr. Stuart. Social life in the bush is a bit primitive. I don't profess to understand the sex." The man's dark eyes were hard as steel. "But my opinion is they're selfish to the core. At a pinch they'll let a man down every time."

"You've been unlucky in your women," the squatter said. "Some of 'em wouldn't let you down in a thousand years. But we won't go into that." With a smile, he changed the subject. "My word, you've grown famous since I saw you last. There's never been a bushranger so talked about as you. I believe you could be elected mayor of Sydney tomorrow on a popular vote. You've caught men's fancy. I suppose they compare you with that devil, Lynch. You've gone a long way in the Robin Hood business in a few months. There's been many a toast drunk to your health in shanties and public houses."

"By men who would get fine entertainment in seeing me hanged," the out-

law said dryly. "They can't gammon me."

He rose.

"I'll be toddling along, Mr. Stuart. By the way, if I should take a fancy to stick up your station when would be the best time for me to be sure of a good haul?"

"I never keep much money on hand. Now's as good a time as any. Of course, I pay wages by check." Stuart's eyes were dancing.

"That's a nuisance. I can't use many checks. It's been a pleasure to meet you."

"Same here. We'll not meet often again. I can see your finish, Haxon."

"You're a Scotchman." The bushranger smiled. "So you're probably thinking of the old ballad:

"Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He played a spring and danced it round
Beneath the gallows tree."

Wrong guess, Mr. Stuart. It won't be that way."

"No, I think not. They'll corner you like a wolf, and shoot you down when you don't surrender."

"You'd advise me to go back with my tail between my legs and ask old Turk McQuirk to let me off with a couple of hundred hard?"

"I'm not advising you. To be frank, I don't see any out for you. I wish I did."

"Then I'll have to 'gang my ain gait', wherever it leads me. Now I'll be going. If it's all the same to you, Mr. Stuart, just stay in your chair until you hear me go. If you shouted, and I had to pot a sheepshearer or a new chum, it would spoil my perfect record, wouldn't it?"

He backed through the doorway, took the porch in two strides, pulled the slip knot in the bridle rein and swung to the saddle. A wooden gate led into the big paddock. Without stopping to open it, he put the stallion at it and sailed over like a bird.

Stuart strolled out to the shearing shed.

One of the workmen brushed the perspiration from his eyes with a brown forearm.

"You missed something, boss," he said. "A young flash was here and had a set-to with the dangdest buck-jumper you ever saw. Stuck it out, too, to a finish."

"Perhaps you'd like to know who the young flash was," Stuart said. "He calls himself John Haxon."

The sheepshearer's jaw dropped in surprise.

"Haxon the bushranger? By George, we might have known it. Soon as I set eyes on him, dressed to the nines, with two big revolvers strapped on him, I knew there was something funny about him. Did he rob you, boss?"

"No. He came to get some more ammunition. I've a feeling, Jimmie, that Mr. Haxon is going to give us something to talk about within a day or two."

Stuart's guess was a good one.

CHAPTER XII

"BAIL UP!"

IN THE shade of a blue gum grove three men lounged. One was hammering rivets in a saddle strap. A second watched him. The third sat with his back against a tree, reading.

The riveter was telling a story.

"Hear that, Captain?" the second man called to the reader. "A fine character we got with us, kissing barmaids and all that."

Haxon put down his book.

"Robbins is a reformed character, Pat. He's through with kissing barmaids," the leader said.

Twenty yards away a black boy was making breakfast. He was middle aged, and so thin that his ribs stood out like slats. His name was Wirra. John Haxon had saved his life from a drunken kangarooer, and since that time he had been the outlaw's devoted slave.

Where Haxon went, he went. Since he was a first class tracker, knew the bush like a dingo and could trap game with amazing skill, he was invaluable. He was a genial soul. Laughter simmered in him just below the surface. When merriment seized him his eyes disappeared, his mouth opened and a discord of gaiety poured forth.

After breakfast Burke brought the horses from where they were hobbled. The three white men saddled.

John Haxon gave the black instructions.

"Keep your eyes open, Wirra. We ought to be back before night. Pack the swags and be ready for us. The blacks have been doing some cattle spearing over Stony Broke way. Have your musket ready for them if they show up."

"Gib it gun. Get um black man," Wirra promised cheerfully.

"No, no. I don't want you to get me a black man. Leave him alone unless he tries to rush the camp. Understand? And don't run off with a gin while I'm away."

Wirra understood this last as a joke. He flung back his head and roared. His face became a network of mirth wrinkles. The bare ribs of his gaunt body shook as he let out a burst of laughter.

"No likum gin," he gasped when the spasm had subsided. "Wirra he drown last gin. She talkee-talkee all time."

Robbins was an old bushman. He had a sure sense of direction. The scrub told him stories entirely sealed to the other two whites. He skirted the densest bush and led them through mallee forests. Along pads which seemed to go from nowhere to nowhere he guided his companions. They climbed a spur which brought them to an iron-bark range of more open country. Leaving the ridge, they plunged again into scrub where the ground was matted with the salt bush.

"Maybe we're going somewhere, but I doubt it," Burke grumbled with a grin.

Then, after hours of steady going, they caught a glimpse of the church spires of Parametta. They dismounted in thick brush. Not once since morning had they seen even a rabbit or a kangarooer.

Haxon explained their plans.

"You're a swagman, Burke. You've got to hoof it in, so you'd better start now. I want you to look hot and tired and down at the mouth. Go to the public house across from the bank. It's called the Iron Duke Hotel. Drink

only beer. Don't talk much. Be a sul-
len brute. When I tie in front of the
public house give me a few minutes,
then lounge out and stand there. See
that nobody gets to our horses. That's
your job. The idea is to look half
asleep, as if you were drowsy with
drink."

"Does Robbins get in before me?"

"It doesn't matter, so that he's in be-
fore me. He ties to the rack in front
of the Iron Duke and goes in. The ex-
planation of his two horses is that he
has come in from the station to meet
his boss, coming back by boat from
Sydney to Parametta. If any one asks
his name, it's Brown, and the station is
in the out-back country. After I have
gone into the bank you walk over and
come in too, Robbins. You both under-
stand that you are not to know each
other. That all clear?"

"All clear, Captain."

Each of the three had a concealed
brace of revolvers, but none of them had
a musket. Haxon intended to arouse
no suspicion.

He busied himself, after the other
two had gone, in making himself up for
the part of a sheepshearer come to
town to knock down his check. Out of
a pack which he opened tumbled a pair
of ragged old boots and rough, worn
clothing. He put on a blue checked
flannel shirt with short sleeves, and
dirty corduroy trousers. Above one eye
he fastened a black patch. His dusty
slouch hat covered his hair completely
and partially concealed his features. In
the old days he had been a pretty good
amateur actor, and he felt he could play
a back-country drifter to the life.

Leisurely he jogged into town, a per-
fect specimen of the itinerant wanderer.
A pair of clipping shears tied to the
pommel lent the last touch of reality to
his pose. To look at him was sufficient
evidence of a dry and dusty throat
down which the pay for three months'
labor would be poured.



PARAMETTA drowsed
sleepily under a noonday sun.
A pair of boys going home
from school could be seen in
the distance. Down the street lurched
a bullock train. From his display of

vegetables a green grocer chased an in-
quisitive puppy. A black, squatted
against a wall, snored noisily. Other-
wise there was no sign of life.

The bushranger tied at the rack in
front of the public house, the Iron Duke.
Two other horses, very familiar to him,
were already fastened to the hitching
post. Haxon looked up and down the
street. All was quiet as a Sabbath
morn in the country. He slouched
across the road to the bank. He did
not look behind him, but he was aware
that some one followed him. That
would be Robbins, he knew.

There were two men in the bank, a
clerk and the manager. The clerk was
writing, the manager talking to a young
woman. Haxon knew she was a young
and not an old woman, though her face
was turned from him, by the lines of
the straight back and the poise of the
head.

Haxon turned toward Robbins, caught
his eye and nodded toward the clerk.
His own attention centered on the man-
ager, a fat, pompous little man, who sat
at a high desk. He lounged forward.

The manager glanced up at him and
frowned. He did not care to be inter-
rupted by a swagman while he was talk-
ing to a young lady.

"Mr. Howes?" asked the outlaw.

"Yes, yes. But not now, my man.
If you've any business with me I'll see
you later. Don't you see I'm busy?"

The young woman looked at the man
who had approached the desk. Her
eyes grew wide with surprise. She
started to speak, then changed her mind.
But her gaze remained fixed on him.

The bushranger smiled sardonically.
The girl talking with Howes was Mary
McQueen. It upset somewhat his plans
for concealing his identity, but that,
after all, was an unimportant matter.

"It has been some time since we met,
Miss McQueen," he said genially.

"Yes," the girl answered.

Thoughts raced through her mind.
What was he doing here in this make-
up? He was known all along the coast
as a great swell. It was a contributing
factor to the great interest of the public
in him. Why then this get-up of a
floating sheepshearer? Had he come to
rob the bank? She had not the least

doubt of it. Excitement began to drum in her veins.

"I'm in your debt for your kindness to young Roberts. Mr. Stuart tells me his health is better."

"Yes. Much better. My father says your friend is a fine young man."

"He's not exactly a friend. I can't afford such luxuries. But I'm glad of your report." He added, looking straight at her, "I've a notion I owe you something on my own account."

Mary flushed.

"Nothing—nothing at all."

"It seems nothing to you," he said, a gleam of mockery on his hard face. "You'll allow me to disagree."

"Look here, my man," the manager fumed. "See the clerk. Don't bother me. Don't you see I'm talking with this lady?"

John Haxon paid not the least attention to his protest.

"She calls it nothing. I don't suppose you ever had fifty hard with the cat, Mr. Howes, laid on by an able bodied lag."

The bank manager turned purple with indignation, but almost at once a vague alarm filtered into his anger. Who was this man? What did he mean by talking about fifty hard? There was a certain covert insolence about his politeness that was disturbing.

"Who are you? What do you want?" stuttered Howes.

"My name is John Haxon," the stranger said. "I want to cash a small check—say a couple of thousand—or more. I won't be unreasonable. Wouldn't think of asking for more than you have on hand."

Howes half rose from the chair. The color was ebbing rapidly from his face.

"I—I—I—" he gasped.

The bushranger pushed him gently back into his chair.

"Don't overexert yourself, Mr. Howes. You don't look well. Just take it easy and do as I say."

"W-what do you want me to do?" the banker asked.

Haxon smiled and bowed politely as he said:

"First, write a notice on a sheet of the bank paper. I'll dictate it."

The hands that reached for the quill pen and sheet of stationery, fat, soft,

and pudgy from easy living, trembled as if they had a palsy.

"Don't h-hurt me," Howes quavered. "I'll do as you say."

Haxon had not drawn a revolver, but he had opened his ragged coat and the butts of two projected. He glanced at Robbins and at the clerk. The bushranger was carrying on a one-sided conversation with the bank assistant. The eyes of the clerk strayed to the group of three at the high desk. He could not hear what was being said, but he felt a little surprise at the deference the manager was paying to this unimportant stranger. His usual absurd manner of pompous importance had collapsed as an inflated balloon does at the prick of a pin.

"Write," ordered Haxon crisply, "'Bank closed for half an hour. By order of manager'. Sign it George Howes."

The unhappy Howes signed the notice. He had lost all of his sense of importance as the leading citizen of the town. Instead, he was only an obese and puffy little man timidly taking orders in fear of his life.

"Now if you'll be so good, Mr. Howes, as to stick this on the outside of the door, and then close and lock it," Haxon suggested. "And don't try and do a bolt or call for help. If you do, you're a goner."

The manager rose shakily. His legs did not seem to know quite how to obey his will.

"D-don't be afraid," he wheezed, as if he had been running. "I'll not c-call or anything."

"I'm not afraid," Haxon told him dryly. "If you make a mistake the flowers won't be for me."

He turned to the girl, his smile a trifle grim.

"You'll come with us, Miss McQueen. You and I will stay inside. And remember, if you make a row it will be unfortunate—for your friend, the gallant George."

As the little procession moved past the other two, Haxon nodded to Robbins. Out came the old sundowner's revolver. To the clerk it looked as big as a cannon.

"Bail up!" Robbins ordered, holding the gun steadily on the clerk.



FOR one moment the clerk looked into the barrel of the revolver in puzzled bewilderment, his jaw hanging on its hinge. Then he realized it was a stick-up and his hands shot into the air.

Howes fastened the notice and then locked and bolted the door.

Mary stood squarely in front of Haxon. A pulse hammered in her brown throat.

"Do you mean to go ahead and rob this bank?"

It was a rhetorical question, made in protest rather than in search of information.

"How did you ever guess it?" Haxon jeered in mock admiration.

"So you're a thief as well as a murderer," she cried in a low voice ringing with contempt.

"We went into that once, you'll remember," the bushranger told the girl, with an almost savage scorn directed either at himself or her. "We had a difference of opinion about what I was like—and you see I was right."

"Yes," she flung back. "I was a fool to think anything else."

"We all have been—even I. We live and learn, Miss McQueen. Next time you'll know better. Now if you'll kindly sit down on that stool behind the desk."

"I prefer to stand," the girl said coldly.

"And I prefer you sit," he said.

Their eyes met and challenged. In his derisive smile there was no warmth. She was an honest woman, and he was a rogue outside the law, but it was her gaze and not his that gave way. Reluctantly she moved to the high stool and sat down.

"Good," he said. "Since I'm temporarily the bank examiner I want our customers to be comfortable. You agree with me, Mr. Howes?"

"Y-yes," the manager echoed.

Haxon's voice changed abruptly. Crisp, harsh command took the place of impudent badinage.

"Now, Howes—step lively. Open the safe. Let's see what you've got."

The bank manager opened the safe. On a shelf, neatly piled, were rows of minted gold. There was another shelf of silver, and one upon which were boxes

containing notes of different denominations.

Robbins produced two meal sacks from his person by some process of legerdemain. Into the sacks Haxon put the gold and the notes. The silver he did not touch.

"A neat haul, guv'nor," Robbins told his chief.

"Reward of merit. If you get up early, Robbins, and work hard and are thrifty fortune smiles upon you. All the copybooks say so."

Footsteps sounded outside. Some one tried the doorknob. Those in the bank heard him say to a companion—

"Howes has gone off to dinner and shut up the shop."

"Lucky beggar—Howes," the other answered. "Nothing to do but sit there and count money he's taking in."

From her high stool Mary slid to the floor and ran to the door. She cried out, her voice a high soprano of excitement:

"Bushrangers! The bank's being robbed! Get help. Quick!"

The clerk lost his head and started for the door. A shot rang out. The girl turned, a queer, surprised look on her face. She sagged against the door, clutching at her shoulder.

"Blimey!" Robbins said. "I missed him and hit the girl."

"You cursed fool!" Haxon cried, in a voice that scorched, as he ran toward Mary. He slid one arm around her waist to support her.

"Get a doctor," he ordered the clerk curtly. "In a hurry, too."

The clerk unbolted and unlocked the door. He disappeared into the street.

Burke showed in the doorway.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"A girl has been shot," Haxon told him. "Sling your hooks, you and Robbins both. Wait for me at the camp. If I'm not there by night hole up in the gap."

"And you, Cap'n?" Robbins asked.

"I'll take care of myself. Get out." Haxon turned to the girl. "It's in the shoulder, isn't it?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she said, voice faint and lips white.

He picked her up and carried her to a bed in the inner room where the clerk

slept.

"Get water, Howes," the bushranger ordered.

From the shoulder Haxon ripped away the dress. It was, he was deeply grateful to see, only a flesh wound.

"Hurts?" he asked.

"Not so much. I'm sick."

The bank manager did not bring the water. He had taken the opportunity to bolt and was scudding along the street yelping the news.

"The bank's being robbed! It's Haxon's gang!"

The bushranger went to look for water himself.

A voice called from the doorway:

"Don't shoot. I'm the doctor." It added, "I happened to be in a public house near when young Trent broke in with word for me to come."

"You're safe as in God's pocket," Haxon told him. "A young woman has been shot. She's in the back room. Do what you can for her at once, Doctor."

The physician made a swift examination.

"It might be worse," he said. "If it had been three inches lower and to the left I wouldn't have been so sure."

Mary's fine gray eyes fastened on the outlaw.

"You'd better go," she urged.

He agreed. Voices from the street filled the air. The slap of running feet could be heard. It was time to be gone.

John Haxon looked down at her.

"Sorry," he said.

Without answering, she continued to gaze at him.

The bushranger opened the window back of the bed and started to climb through. Then, with a short laugh, he lowered himself to the floor.

"I almost forgot something," he said.

He walked back into the large room, revolver in hand. Two or three men were edging cautiously through the front door on a tour of investigation. One of them carried a derringer, another a hunting knife.

Haxon's command rang out sharply.

"Drop that gun, you in the brown hat, or I'll drill you."

The derringer clattered to the floor.

The outlaw picked up the sacks with the loot. He backed into the small

room, flung the sacks out of the window and followed them. Picking up the sacks, he ran around the house to the street. His horse was still hitched in front of the Iron Duke. But he could see a constable in uniform running down the road with a musket in his hands. Another man was peering from an upper story window of the hotel a little farther up the street. The barrel of a gun projected in front of him.

The bank robber ran across the street to his horse. He pulled the slip knot of the bridle reins and vaulted to the saddle without touching the stirrups. A moment later he had swung the animal around and was galloping down the road, lying low along the neck of the stallion.

The constable took quick aim and fired. The bullet struck the pommel of the saddle and tore through the leather. Haxon heard the roar of other guns. Men were firing at him from windows and doors. It seemed to him that he was flying through a lane of fire.

As he passed out of range Haxon turned and waved a hand derisively.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONG ARM OF CHANCE

IT HAD been touch and go, but he had done it. He had ridden safely through a lane of fire and brought with him the treasure which in the excitement of the moment he had almost forgotten. Tomorrow citizens of Sydney would read at the breakfast table of his audacious exploit. It would be one more to add to the tale of his picturesque crimes. In a hundred public houses he would be toasted as a hero.

Yet John Haxon rode into the bush with no feeling of elation. He was distinctly unhappy. A girl had been shot, the one young woman out of all the millions in the world to whom he owed a debt of gratitude. No use to tell himself he would not have had it happen for ten thousand pounds. The fact remained that it had occurred because of the bank robbery.

Thank God she had not been killed! He smiled sardonically, but, outlaw though he was, the words were more than a formula on his lips. He was

profoundly grateful the wound was one which would heal rapidly.

He could still see her, standing before him undaunted, flinging her scorn in his teeth. What a blaze there was in her fine gray eyes! How light her movements were, as if she skipped in the sunshine of a fresh, windswept world. And he had once thought her plain, he recalled. By Jove, she was a beautiful young thing, full of spirited life.

As surely as if he had done it with his own hand he had shot her down. If she didn't get well—and sometimes flesh wounds took a bad turn—if the doctor didn't know his business or she had had luck—

He would not let himself think about that. What was the use of conjuring up woes that would never happen.

Haxon rode deep into the bush, to the place where he had changed clothes a few hours earlier. He retrieved his custom made boots, his cord riding breeches, his fine linen shirt, and his expensive wideawake hat. The old clothes he threw away.

Not yet a first-class bushman, he followed the pad to a road. By a round-about way he knew how to get to the camp, though he could not take a direct line to it as Robbins probably had. On the road he met a rabbitier loaded with pelts, and a few miles farther along passed through a mob of sheep and goats in charge of a Yorkshire government man assigned to an adjoining station. Once he started up a family of kangaroos. A wallaby ran across the pad in front of him. Greenies he saw frequently. The discordant scream of a sulphur crested cockatoo came to him, though he did not get a glimpse of the bird.

It was teatime before he reached camp. While still a couple of hundred yards away he gave a "cooey". Back to him came the signal agreed upon by the bushrangers, an assurance that all was well—a "cooey" repeated twice, then after a short interval once more.

Robbins flung a question at him before he had alighted.

"'Ow's the young lady, guv'ner?"

"Not your fault she's not dead," Haxon said severely.

"But she isn't. Tell me she isn't," the old back-blocker urged anxiously.

"No, she's not. You hit her in the shoulder, a flesh wound. If there's no blood-poisoning she'll get well. What do you mean breaking my orders about firing?"

"I must 'ave lost my 'ead, boss, when that cove, the bank clerk, jumped for the door. Cross my heart, I shot before I thought."

"If you'd killed Miss McQueen we wouldn't have lasted a month. They won't stand for that out here. The very men who find it worthwhile to play in with us now would have turned us over to the traps. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes."

Robbins hung his head. He had no defense.

"You get a thrashing for that," Haxon told him quietly.

"Yes, Cap'n. Brought it on myself," the sundowner said submissively. "Can't grouse about that."

He stood up to Haxon and did his best. In the prime of life, he was a strong, tough fellow, still full of vigor and power. But he had against him one who was both a skilful boxer and a fighter. There were not half a dozen men in Australia who could have held their own against John Haxon. Robbins bulged with muscle which stood out knobbily, whereas his opponent's flesh was smooth and his limbs not at all massive. It was a treat to see the energy rippling beneath the satiny skin of the younger man.

Though he knew he was beaten before he began, Robbins tried to carry the fight to the other. He rushed, his arms flying like a windmill. Haxon stopped him with a straight left to the cheek and followed with a right to the ribs that made the sundowner gasp. An uppercut caught Robbins on the chin, and a shortarm jolt landed hard above the heart. The older man tried to clinch, but he was shaken off by a wallop to the jaw which lighted a constellation of stars for him.

Burke looked on, keenly interested. He had never seen a prettier performance. As far as he could tell, the timing and the footwork of Haxon were perfect.

He parried, ducked, sidestepped and drew back with a precision that wasted no effort. But always before he got out of range could be heard the smack of his blows striking home.

The fight was too unequal to last long. Robbins was puffing and blowing. His arms and legs were weary. He staggered as he plowed in, head down. Haxon ended it with a short hard uppercut to the very point of the chin. Robbins swayed on his feet and went down.

"A bucket of water, Wirra," ordered the *poonarie* of the black.

Before the water arrived Robbins showed signs of life. He sat up, gathered a sense of the situation and grinned at his chief.

"Glad that's through with, boss," he said. "I'd as soon fight a circular saw as you. 'Oly smoke, 'ow you do lam them 'ome."

He spoke in pure admiration. That his punishment had been administered without anger he did not need to be told.

"Better get down to the brook and wash off, old chap," Haxon advised amiably. "You look a sight."

Robbins touched his bruised face tenderly.

"I'll lay I do. And I never even touched you, earnest though I was."

"You won't kiss any barmaids for awhile, not if they see you first," Burke volunteered with a grin. "Come along, old boy. Toddle down with me to the tub and see what cold water will do."



THE two went down to the creek together. In the water that Wirra brought, John Haxon washed his hands and face while the black watched.

Wirra's eyes twinkled and vanished in laughter.

"Might be he do what *poonarie* say next time," the black boy said.

"Some one has to run the show, Wirra," his master said carelessly. "Seen anything of the blackbirds who have been spearing sheep near Stony Broke?"

"No see um, boss. Me get um *euro* for *poonarie's* dinner."

"A young one? I don't care for tough old kangaroo."

"Velly good *euro*."

Wirra smacked his lips to show how good.

"Tea ready."

"Wirra catchum in jiffy."

"Trot along, boy. We're breaking camp after tea. It's back to Blind Man's Gap for us till this shindy blows over."

Tea finished, Haxon told Burke to get a bluey.

The Irishman brought a blanket. Haxon stretched it on the ground and emptied on it the sack of gold taken in the bank raid. He divided the money into four equal parts—one for Burke, one for Robbins, and the other two for himself. The black had no use for gold. In the same proportion the notes were shared.

Robbins drew his share in, a grin of satisfaction on his battered face.

"More chink than I ever saw before," he said, as he stowed the money away in his belt.

"Begorry, I'd rather be a gentleman of the bush than one of Killough's slaves—or old Turk McQuirk's either," Burke said. "We get a run for it, even if we don't last long."

For the money Haxon cared little. It would not buy him what it bought other men—ease, comfort, a position in the country, the chance to make a home. He took a double share only because it symbolized leadership and made for discipline.

They loaded a packhorse with their swag and struck into the bush. Wirra led the way on foot. When they were in open country and moved faster than a walk he would catch Haxon's stirrup and run beside the stallion. Swarms of mosquitos traveled with them.

The three bushrangers spent the night in an abandoned shack at the back of a ten-mile paddock. The black slept outside. At break of day Wirra was up building a camp-fire. Within the hour they were on their way.

A pad meandered up a spur where ironbark and boxwood grew. The chatter of birds filled the air.

"Listen to the bally magpies," Burke said. "When I hear 'em, before I'm well awake, I think I'm a kid again in the old country listening to the birds in the hedges. Many's the time I've gone

birdnesting in Paddy Duff's meadow and been chased by his bull—bad cess to the brute."

A king parrakeet flashed past in colorful beauty, green and crimson except for the blue back and black tail. Its plumage was so smooth that it gave a Parisian effect of style.

"You wouldn't see one of them in old Ireland," Robbins challenged. "Your birds there are gray bits of things, I'm thinking. And you wouldn't 'ave your legs across a good horse either, Pat, not unless you were on the way to the plowing for some squireen. Don't forget that, me lad, when you get to boo-hooing about the old sod. You're in a free country, where you're just as good as another man, and—"

"When did you get your last Botany Bay dozen, Robbins?" his chief asked ironically.

Burke grinned.

"Put that in your pipe and smoke it, me boy," he jeered.

They rode until late afternoon without seeing any one. Few travelers got back as far into the bush as this. If only a short stop was made for tea they would reach the gap before midnight.

From an open grove to the left, as the bushrangers rode up a ridge, came a faint cooey. It sounded like the call of some one in distress.

Haxon drew up warily. It might be a trap. There were plenty of constables who would like to have the credit for nabbing John Haxon and his gang. Yet it did not seem likely that the police, even with the best of black trackers to guide them, would be in this vicinity, not at least with the expectation of capturing him. They would have no reason to think he would be there.

The cooey came to them again.

The bushranger chief made up his mind.

"Answer it, Robbins."

"Co-o-o-o-ey!"

Robbins poured from his throat the far-carrying cry of the bushman. A third time the call came to them. It was more a groan than a shout.

"Wait here a minute," Haxon directed. "I'll ride in and find out."

Wirra caught at his bridle.

"Look, poonarie!"

The gaze of Haxon followed the pointing finger. It fell on a man tied to a tree. His head and arms drooped forward as if he were in a state of complete exhaustion. Was it a trick? Haxon did not think so.

"We've got to help the poor devil," he said. "Wait here until I call you."

He dismounted and handed the reins to Wirra, then advanced carefully, his musket in readiness. His eyes swept the grove. There was no sign of life. The man lashed to the tree had apparently collapsed. The bushranger saw bloodstains on his arms where the thongs had cut into the flesh. Haxon hesitated no longer.

Running to the tree, he cut the man free with his knife. An inert body tumbled into his arms.



THE others joined him. Wirra brought with him a waterbag. On the gaunt, bearded face of the unconscious man Burke sprinkled water. Presently he opened his eyes and gasped—

"Water."

They gave it to him, a little at a time. His tongue was so thick it almost filled the mouth. From sunken eyes he gazed at Haxon.

With difficulty he got out one word.

"Lynch."

"You mean Lynch did this?" Haxon asked. "Don't try to talk yet. Nod your head."

The man complied.

"That Lynch is the devil's spawn just out of hell," Burke cried, his eyes blazing. "If I had a twist on his hairy throat I'd send him back home, I would."

"How long ago? One day? Two days?" Haxon asked.

The victim nodded at the third question.

"We're in the nick of time. He wouldn't have lasted the night out," Robbins said.

"We'll camp here," the leader said. "He's not fit to travel yet. There's a bottle of whisky in my swag, Pat. Will you get it? A drink of it would do him good."

Presently the man sat up.

"I'll be—all right—now," he said.

After a time he drank some tea and ate a little food. He wanted more, and at intervals they fed him an increasing quantity.

He was, it appeared, a government man assigned to a sheep station, by name David Jones. Lynch had raided the station three days before this time, bailed up the owner and his shearers, locked up the women until such time as he would want to look them over more carefully, and proceeded to get drunk. Jones had been absent from the home station and had returned while the bushrangers were carousing. Afraid of what the outlaws might do to the women, the assigned man had found a way to release them. They had piled into a boat and escaped across the river, but one of the gang had seen Jones helping them. Lynch had forced the convict to ride with him. After many hours of travel through the bush he had lashed him to a gum tree and ridden away. Because it was a crueler death than shooting he had chosen it.

"Just like Lynch," Robbins exploded with an oath. "That scurvy scalawag gives all bushrangers a bad name. Before he's through he'll have us all hanged."

Jones opened his eyes wide and looked from one to another of them. His startled gaze rested on Haxon. The waning light was not very good, but there was light enough for him to make an amazing discovery. He stared at the leader of the outlaws.

"My friend, you'll know me again," Haxon said dryly.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before he realized that the man knew him already and that the recognition was agitating him profoundly.

"You are—John Haxon!" the rescued man gasped.

The bushranger looked at him closely. "At your service," he said curtly.

"You've met me before. Where?"

"I've—seen your picture on the posters scattered by the constabulary," the man said.

Haxon knew he was concealing something. Vaguely, there stirred in him some memory. Somewhere in his buried past the bandit had seen this chinless face with the flattened nose and pro-

truding eyes. But he could not put his finger on the time or place. Probably it made no difference anyhow. But why had the man been so shaken at sight of him?

Burke gave Jones tobacco for his pipe, but after a short smoke the latter said he was done up and thought he'd roll in for the night. Haxon noticed that the fellow's eyes evaded his.

In a bluey tossed to him by Robbins the man from the sheep station rolled up and turned away from the fire.

Haxon sat before the fire smoking his pipe while his two associates played cards with a greasy pack. Above the gums, where there was no roof of foliage, they could see a full moon riding the heavens. The smoking man let his mind slip back into the past. Pictures rose before him, evoked by fugitive memories. He was trying to find one that associated itself with the face of this David Jones. They came and went, dozens of them, but none of them connected with the trusty.

Abruptly his body stiffened. He took the pipe from his mouth and stared into the red coals of the dying fire. What he saw was a courtroom filled with men—lawyers, a judge, a jury, rows of spectators. A man was on trial for his life. The man in the dock looked around on a sea of faces, not one of them friendly or familiar. The faces of those attending the trial changed from day to day, but the prisoner grew to expect always the presence of one man. Even in his preoccupation with his own plight the victim about to be condemned found time to wonder what the cause might be of the look of stark fear, of anguished dread, in the bulging eyes of this little man with the flattened nose and the weak chin.

Haxon walked across to where the man lay rolled in the bluey. He stooped down and examined the face. There could be no doubt about it. This was the man who had found such a keen, such a terrifying interest in his trial, this convict who lay sleeping with his chinless mouth open.

John Haxon could think of only one man who might have any reason to sweat fear at his trial except himself. If the real murderer were among the

spectators in the courtroom, if he was in terror lest through some mischance the truth might come out, he would have cause enough to fear. The idea was of course preposterous, and yet Haxon could not wholly reject it.

This little fellow did not look like a murderer. He had in him neither force nor viciousness, unless Haxon missed his guess. But he might be a tool of some one who had both. Often the lifer had wondered what part if any his cousin Henry Killough had had in the death of Mullin. Killough had given false testimony at the trial when he swore he had seen Haxon coming out of the lodging house where Mullin was staying at the time of his death. He might have done that merely to clear the way to the estates of Sir Eustace by getting rid of the heir, or he might have had a more urgent immediate reason.

Mullin had once been a servant at Oak Manor. He was the man who had lied to Sir Eustace by telling him that he had seen Geoffrey Blake breaking open the desk from which fifty pounds belonging to the old man had been stolen. This had been the last straw with Sir Eustace. He was a strong, fierce old man, proud of his integrity and of the family name. Many times he had stormed at Geoffrey for his wild extravagance, for the debts which he piled up wherever he went. It was his tenet that no gentleman ran up bills which he could not meet. Much as he loved the boy, he had more than once threatened to disinherit him.

On the very day before the robbery he had quarreled furiously with him on account of a letter from a money lender to whom Geoffrey owed an I.O.U. And Mullin had planted proof that what he said was true. The chisel with which the desk had been broken open, as well as part of the stolen money, were found in Geoffrey's room hidden under a carpet. Even then, so Geoffrey thought later, he might have convinced his uncle that the story was false if he had kept his temper under the storm of scorn and anger with which Sir Eustace assailed him.

But he had flown into a rage when told he was a disgrace to the family

name, had sworn never to use it again until his uncle apologized to him, and had walked out of the house a disinherited man.

He had kept his word, even during the trial with the shadow of the rope hanging over him. Nobody but Henry Killough and one woman had known that John Haxon was Geoffrey Blake, and both of these for reasons of their own had concealed the truth.

Sitting before the embers of the bush fire, John Haxon wondered for the thousandth time how great was the debt of hate he owed his cousin. He had felt, even before the blow-up at Oak Manor, that there was some discreditable link between the blackleg Mullin and Henry Killough. Was it possible that Mullin had got in Killough's way, that he knew some secret and was blackmailing him, and that the captain had killed him to protect himself?

If so, how did this weakling Jones get into the picture?

For hours Haxon puzzled over the problem without finding an answer. Yet he felt that if he could only find the clue—now, before he took the assigned man back to his station—the whole thing would become clear to him.

The moon was low in the sky before he at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

BUSH TRIAL

WHILE his men were loading the packhorse next morning Haxon turned abruptly to the rescued man and flung a question at him.

"For what were you transported?"

The eyes of Jones flew a flag of distress.

"For highway robbery," he said, after a moment of hesitation.

"In what part of England?"

Jones swallowed before he answered.

"On the Old York road. I didn't do it. I'm an innocent man."

"We all are," Haxon replied dryly.

"I've never fired a pistol in my life."

"If you were innocent, why were you convicted?"

"They found money on me. I—I couldn't explain how I got it."

"How did you get it?"

Jones writhed. He could not escape the stern gaze fixed on him. He knew that this man was going to draw from him the secret that had filled his life with remorse, one that for hours he had been trying to find courage to confess. Yet he drew back, seeking to evade the issue. He wanted to make a clean breast, but he dared not.

"I—won it—betting on a horse."

"What horse?"

"I don't remember, gov'nor."

Haxon shifted the attack.

"When were you convicted?"

The date Jones gave, very reluctantly, was less than three weeks after the date of John Haxon's conviction.

"How much money did they find on you?" the bushranger asked.

"A little over thirty pounds."

The outlaw felt a curious prickling along his spine. He knew he was close to a discovery. The testimony at his own trial had showed that Mullin was on the day of the murder in possession of sixty pounds won at the races a short time before. When his body was found by the police the money was missing. It was likely enough that Jones had been involved in the highway robbery too. Haxon cared nothing about that. His interest centered in another crime. His guesses had very little but suspicion back of them, but he threw one out as a challenge with a manner of confidence almost ferocious in its directness.

"Thirty pounds for you and thirty for Killough."

Jones stared at him in consternation. He tried to speak, but the words would not come. At last a quaking question came.

"W-what do you mean, gov'nor?"

"I mean you helped Killough kill Mullin on the night of Boxing Day three years ago."

Jones flung up a hand to ward off the accusing eyes that stabbed into his.

"No, no, no!"

"I'm going to have the story straight. No lies—no evasions."

The little man went into a panic.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I'm telling you the Gawd's truth, sir."

Haxon did not answer him. He spoke to Burke.

"You chaps can sling your hooks. Wait for me at Willoughby Bar. Jones stays with me."

That was a rum go, Burke thought. But he did not say so. One did not dispute the decisions of John Haxon. There was never any doubt in the minds of his men as to who was running the show.

As soon as the two bushrangers and the black had passed out of sight Haxon turned to the other convict.

"Now, Mr. Jones, will you talk or won't you?"

"S' help me, gov'nor, I don't know what you're talking about."

Tiny beads of perspiration stood on the man's forehead. Brought to the brink of a confession, he dared not go through with it. He was afraid this man would kill him like a dingo. But though his words denied, his terror-filled eyes betrayed him.

Haxon had picked up a rope. He tossed the looped end of it over the head of Jones.

The trusty gave a startled cry.

"What's your game? What you going to do with me?" he asked shrilly.

Haxon did not answer. He closed with the man, pinned his arms, and drew the loop tight around the waist. Jones fought, but he was as helpless as a child in the grip of the outlaw, who bound him so that he could scarcely move a finger.

The prisoner poured out a stream of supplication, to which the bushranger paid no attention. The trusty was dragged to the same tree from which he had been released the night before. To this Haxon lashed him securely.

Terror stared from the goggling eyes of the prisoner.

"You ain't going to leave me here, gov'nor," he begged. "You wouldn't do that to a cove, now, would you?"

"Here's where I found you. Here's where I leave you. If you think I'm going to save you from Lynch's vengeance after you've ruined my life, your guess is wrong. You'll tell me the whole truth or you'll stay here. Maybe a second miracle will save you."

TO BE CONTINUED



The CAMP-FIRE

*A free-to-all meeting place for
readers, writers and adventurers*

TO ACCOMPANY his story in this issue, "The Crown on Crocodile Island", Robert Simpson sends in the following note on West African witchcraft:

New York City

In some explanation of the motive behind such conceptions as that of the crocodile pool at Saganna which plays its own part in "The Crown on Crocodile Island", it is a pretty generally recognized fact that all rites and ceremonials of the sort have their roots in witchcraft of a none too subtle character.

In West Africa, where an abundant and violent and most mysterious Nature lends itself generously to all kinds of diabolical superstitions, witchcraft or *juju palaver* at its worst thrives as encouragingly as the seething life that is so endlessly and prolifically generated there. And witchcraft, to be really impressive, must, upon frequent occasion, stage the most climactic of all human dramas—the drama which has for its climax the sacrifice of human life.

THE death of a chief, the business of casting out devils, or just the matter of determining the guilt or innocence of one or more suspected

persons—these are a few of the things which give the witch-doctor a chance to get into action.

Chiefs, for instance, have an awkward trick of dying mysteriously in West Africa. The village witch-doctor sees to that, even where no element of mystery is involved, because it is the alleged fatal injury to the inviolate person of a chief that gives the witch-doctor his most ideal opportunity to have a number of people subjected to whatever form of "test" happens to be a favorite in his repertoire.

If he likes to see his victims shaken like a rag in the jaws of a hungry crocodile, he arranges the test to accommodate this preference; if he prefers to see them sit in gray agony waiting for the "poisoned cup" to take effect, he may make some concessions to originality in perpetrating this rather time-worn trick, but he generally gets very satisfactory results.

POSSIBLY the most celebrated instance of this was that which followed hard upon the death of the famous Duke Ephriam of Duke Town, Old Calabar. Fifty of the deceased's household were compelled to "chop nut"—that is, to drink a concoction prepared from the Esere or Calabar bean.

Forty of them died. Just why the other ten escaped no one knew except the witch-doctor,

and it is never a part of a witch-doctor's business to explain these things. His living is earned by seeing to it that they do happen. Because, of course, if every one died, the test would not be at all convincing. And, after all, forty out of fifty was a good day's work, even to account for the death of a chief as big as Duke Ephriam.

Witch-doctors in West Africa do some amazing things, and some really convincing things; and if one is a paddle-boy in a loincloth there is no limit to what a witch-doctor can make one believe.

—ROBERT SIMPSON

If Mr. Bent writes any further letters which you publish on the necessity of decent America putting down crime, may I suggest that he will lessen any possible criticism if he distinguishes between "arrests" and "convictions" for crime, and between the "symptoms", or *manifestations* of crime, and the "causes" of crime, and indicates how the mild and inoffensive citizen, wishing to avert trouble, is to avoid the imposition of the racketeer without danger to his store and his home, with whatever persons or articles there may be therein.

—ELIOT NORTON

FINGERPRINTING and the Bertillon system:

East Gloucester, Massachusetts

I noticed in the article by James W. Bennett entitled "Wang Tzu-Bang, Eighth Secretary", he makes a statement about fingerprints. He says: "A printed card with three thumb marks that would have delighted Bertillon."

Now, being a fingerprint student in the Institute of Applied Science and a pupil of Mr. T. G. Cooke, the famous fingerprint expert, I would like to make a few remarks. Alphonse M. Bertillon did not invent the fingerprint system of identification. The Bertillon system is based upon certain measurements of the human body and not upon fingerprints. The modern system of fingerprinting was invented by Sir E. R. Henry of Great Britain. Due to the fact that the Bertillon system of identification has failed to "get its man" it is being rapidly replaced everywhere by the Henry fingerprint system.

These two systems are entirely unlike, but many people still confuse them, and refer to fingerprint identification as the Bertillon system.

—A. GEARY JOHNSON

A NOTE on crime and punishment:

Paris, France

In the number of your magazine dated July 1st you printed in Camp-fire a letter of Mr. Bent's. I think you and he will be interested in these quotations from Mr. Edgar Wallace's (the famous novelist's) autobiography.

"Prison only puts the fear of God into the non-criminal classes: to the habitual criminal it is a home from home. . . . Until prison is a really horrible place . . . you will have little or no diminution of professional crime. A month of the treatment I received in the military prison at Aldershot would . . . make a man think three times before he preferred his old practices to honest labor. . . . There should be disciplinary prisons, where the punishment is short and sharp; where within the limits of humanity, a prisoner's life should be made so unbearable that he would never risk a repetition of his experience. . . . I have perhaps a better acquaintance with the criminal than any save the 'highest command' at Scotland Yard."

NOT infrequently our Ask Adventure men are asked to pass on the accuracy of wild-life stories as reported in the newspapers. Mr. Ernest W. Shaw, after offering comment on this one, turns it over to you in forum:

Los Angeles, California

I read over the enclosed article in the *Bent County (Colorado) Democrat*. It sounds rather improbable to me that a deer with both legs fractured could cover as much territory as is described.

I own a large ranch near this county. I have hunted deer in all parts of the Southwest, but I have never seen an animal that could do much damage in so badly wounded a state.

What do you think of this man's experience?

—RAYMOND O. WATTS

VICIOUS DEER ATTACKS FORT LYON HUNTER AND CHASES HIM UP A TREE

Verner I. Wilson, of Fort Lyon, well known Chevrolet salesman, in company with Mr. Dewalt, also of Fort Lyon, returned from the Frying Pan district in the mountains with their deer last week. Mr. Wilson had an experience with the deer he brought back that he does not care to repeat very soon. He brought down the animal with his rifle and thinking it was dead he pulled out his knife and started to stick it. Just about this time the deer came to life very suddenly, and although both its front legs were broken it reared up on its hind legs like a kangaroo and lunged at Wilson, hitting him with its horns and knocking him to the ground. Before he could regain his feet the deer had planted both horns and hoofs on his body, bruising him badly about the chest.

Regaining his feet, he tried to get around the maddened animal, realizing that it would have a hard time lunging up the steep mountain side. But the deer was ready for him and attacked him so ferociously there was nothing for him to do but run down the mountain with the deer making vicious lunges at him at every step. He lost his knife in the first onslaught and as he bad laid

his rifle down he had no weapons to defend himself. He had carried a revolver in his holster the first two days, but owing to its weight had left it in camp.

He finally reached a tree which he was able to climb. (Mr. Wilson is minus one of his hands and tree climbing is difficult for him.) After getting him up in the tree the deer continued to charge the tree at frequent intervals and kept a close watch to see that the man he had treed did not escape. Mr. Wilson went up the tree at 11.30 in the forenoon and had to remain there until 2.30 in the afternoon before his plight was discovered. A man who happened to come that way on horseback was attracted to the scene and finished killing the deer, thereby letting Mr. Wilson escape.

He was very weak from his injuries and the excitement through which he had passed, and was barely able to cling to his precarious position in the tree until help arrived. He went at once to Leadville, where an examination by a physician showed that there were no broken bones or other serious injuries other than bad bruises and some hoof cuts. He brought the deer out with him and thinks he earned it. It is a 4-point animal and weighed about 250 pounds. Mr. Wilson states that the jumps and lunges the wounded deer was able to make on its hind legs was a revelation to him. He didn't think it could be done, but he knows better now.

Mr. Shaw's reply:

South Carver, Massachusetts

I have read your letter and the clipping with much interest. I agree with you that it seems highly improbable that the circumstance happened as described. It seems more likely that there is some background of truth in the article, but that some reporter or correspondent has touched it up in spots to make it of greater news value.

I know that a deer can travel fast and far on the stumps of both front legs broken below the knees, but what sticks is the one-armed hunter climbing a tree well ahead of the deer. I would hesitate to pronounce the story as pure fiction simply because such a happening had never happened to me or under my observation. I have witnessed so many strange and almost unbelievable things in connection with game animals and man, that I do not care to go on record as disputing the article without knowing more about it.

It would be interesting if this should appear in Camp-fire and we could hear the various rhapsodies of the gang.

Thanks for showing me the clipping. Back in 1900, or thereabouts, I helped rope a deer not far from where this Wilson matter was supposed to have happened, and we earmarked him (a buck). Nearly ten years later that deer was killed in a distant portion of the State.

—ERNEST W. SHAW

WHERE good burros go when they die:

Hudson, Massachusetts

As to the dead burros mentioned in Comrade Wheeler's letter in the issue of March 1, I offer this:

An old Mexican in Arizona told me that when the burros get decrepit they are rounded up by celestial burro-punchers and started on the trail to the Paradise of the Burros, which lies at the end of the Milky Way and is presided over by San Antonio. Before they start, each one is loaded with gold, and as the trail is rough and rocky and full of holes, the burros stumble and part of the load is lost and falls through the holes on to the earth.

Thereby accounting for two strange things: the lack of dead burros and the presence of gold in the most unlikely and impossible places. This is more reasonable than the Weller theory ("Pickwick Papers"), since the postboy is no longer with us.

—CHARLES E. ROE

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A FEW words from Georges Surdez, in connection with his story in this issue, "The Man from Nowhere".

Istanbul, Turkey

The description of the snowstorm in "The Man From Nowhere" will probably cause some surprise, for the general belief seems to be that North Africa has a sub-tropical climate. The winters are cold. A friend of mine, sergeant in the Legion, told me that he had suffered more from cold on the High Plateau than he had in his own country, Denmark.

I crossed that desolate region several times, in the Spring and Summer, and was glad to have blankets along. The records of the Foreign Legion will show that in 1908 a company of the Corps was lost, wiped out by a storm. Another company suffered severe casualties around 1920.

THE Legion has no propaganda service, makes no effort to get recruits. But throughout France, when a stranger enters a military building, those who greet him are apt to leap at conclusions. French is not required, neither is the ability to sign one's name—the Legion is interested in obtaining physically sound men—to fight. I have met two Legionnaires who could not remember signing the contracts although they had signed them. And I have met a dozen who could not speak more than a few words of very broken French, even after months in Africa.

There was a "man from nowhere" in Oran, whom I met. No more than any one else could I be sure where he came from. Paul Soun, a Chinese, told me he could not classify him. His nationality was indicated on the records as "doubtful". He understood and spoke French quite well, although evidently an Asiatic. And he knew English enough to cut short my amiable probings with the one terse sentence: "I consider my nationality a private matter."

Albert Londres, in his sensational book on the North African penal camps, "Biribi", tells a story quite as bizarre as Vyano's experience:

In one of the camps he met a man who had been sent from the Foreign Legion for a long stretch. The poor chap claimed that he had been picked up by the police in Marseilles while taking a stroll away from the ship on which he was an oiler, and put into prison. As he knew no French, he was unable to ask for explanations, and was transferred from prison to ship, from ship to prison, to the Legion, to the penal camp. After a few months, he understood that he was mistaken for another man, who resembled his general description, a deserter from the Corps. When he attempted to make clear that a mistake had been made, his guards laughed at him—it was a good story, but had been tried before without success!

—GEORGES SURDEZ

~~Adventures in the Desert~~

SEVERAL authorities on mining, like Victor Shaw of Ask Adventure, have recently suggested that hundreds of men might obtain relief from unemployment by being directed to a prospect in some of the numerous promising fields in the United States and Alaska. The following offer may interest some who can manage to search as far afield as Mexico:

João Pessoa, Brazil

Compañeros, this is my first offense, hear with me patiently. During the many years that I have been reading *Adventure* I have found the Camp-fire one of the most interesting parts of it, and there have been many times when I was tempted to hutt in. I have noticed lately a decided increase of interest in prospecting, due, I suppose, to lack of employment, but no matter what the reason is, it is a step in the right direction. For a man unencumbered by any one dependent upon him, willing to do quite a good deal of hard work, whose horizon is not bounded by the pleasures to be found in our so-called civilization, it is the cleanest way to earn a living that there is, and has the usual job looking like a penny to a spendthrift.

Up to 1925 I spent most of my life in Mex-

ico, from 1902 to 1908 partly in the employ of various mining companies in different parts of the country, and partly in expeditions on my own account. During that time I naturally acquired some information that may or not be of some value; that remains to be proven. I have kept this information to myself, hoping sometime to be able to go back and prove up, but now increasing age and the consequent inability to stand the hardship make that impossible. To any one who is not a paid prospector for some corporation, but is out for himself and has the ability and guts to profit by it, I am willing to impart this information without any obligation on his part, providing of course, that he prove to me that such is the case.

In one of the issues of *Adventure* some time back, there was an inquiry by some parties who intended to explore the Usumacinta and San Pedro Rivers in Mexico. I intended to write to these parties at the time, but neglected to do so. If they see this article they might investigate the following: In the museum in Merida and in a drug store in Campeche there are skulls that have been recovered in that region that show what was probably the earliest dental work. These skulls have the four upper front teeth excavated and small pieces of blue stone placed therein. All that I was able to learn was that they were found in one of the mounds so numerous in that section.

I know quite a little about some of the out of the way parts of Mexico, and any help that I can give to a prospector or explorer will be cheerfully rendered; paid prospectors and the simply curious please lay off.

—HENRY WEST

~~Adventures in the Desert~~

THE motto on the shield of Erin:

The Newspaper Club, New York City
In a letter from Donald O'Sullivan to the Camp-fire, he translates the Gaelic, "Lamh Foiste-neach an Uachtar," as "The Gentle Hand Uppermost", whereas I have heard it frequently translated: "Raise the Hand in Peace First."

Possibly instead of the period after "first" there should be a dash, leaving the completion of the sentence to the reader. Possibly it could run this way: "Raise the Hand in Peace First"—(and if they won't behave, then the sword).

—SYLVESTER SULLIVAN

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstances.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.



Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Japan

FISH-FIGHTING, a minor sport borrowed from Siam.

Request:—"Is it a fact that the Japanese people indulge in the sport of fighting eels, that is pitting one eel against another as the Latin-American countries do in cock-fights? If so, what type of eel do they use? If my assumption is wrong on this, do they have any other sport the equivalent of cock-fighting?"

—M. M. BRADFORD, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Oscar E. Riley:—The tendency of a fish is to swim away when bullied by another fish. However, the stone loach, a fish shaped like an eel, meets annoyers head on, thus giving the appearance of fighting. It is not real fighting, as no injury is caused, and it is not a sporting contest, as it does not end in a win, according to Thomas Howley, fish culturist of the New York Aquarium.

The real fighting fish is the Betta splendens, or fighting fish of Siam. This fish is 2 or 3 inches long, and when two are permitted together in one tank, they begin fighting. They continue nipping at each other until one is killed. In Siam quite sizable bets are placed on favorite contestants in these fish fights.

Within recent years, this Siam fish has been imported into Japan and such fights have developed into a great sporting interest there, states M. Y. Inomata, representative for North America of the Japan Tourist Bureau. As soon as they begin fighting, these fish lose their drab yellow color and become brilliant red, pink or other hue. Spectators in Japan enjoy the color effects more than the kill. Mr. Inomata believes your inquiry refers to these fish fights, as he has never heard of eel or stone loach contests in Japan. Exhaustive books on Japan make no mention of eel fights.

Cock-fights and dog-fights are prohibited by

law in Japan. When held, they are staged behind tall fences, so that the public can neither witness the fight nor hear the noise. Since the promoters are subject to arrest, these fights are rare. Besides, as sport they are overshadowed by baseball, tennis and other Occidental games which have caught on like wildfire in Japan.

In dog-fights, the contest goes on as long as the dogs continue barking, showing that they are full of vitality. However, as soon as one dog screams, it is declared the loser. Another minor sport in Japan which is not prohibited by law is dog wrestling, involving only a test of endurance and skill.

Pearl Diver

A COCONUT oil massage for that chilly feeling.

Request:—"I am reading a book entitled 'Pearl Diver' by Victor Berg, and in one part he says, 'I learned about that wonderful massage they use constantly which keeps their bodies in such extraordinary condition,' but he didn't tell a thing about it, so I would be very pleased if you could give me any information about this massage, method of massaging, how often, and what sort of oil is used."

—STANLEY DEGGES, Baltimore, Maryland

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—It is really more of a rubbing down than a massage that is indulged in by the pearl diver. He covers the whole of his body with coconut oil. This treatment is not peculiar to the pearl diver. It is the habit and custom of every native in every one of the hundreds of islands in the South Seas. Every native before and after going into the water—and they are like fish in their fondness for the sea—rubs himself or herself well with the oil, which is probably the oiliest and smoothest and most satisfactory lubricant on this foot-

stool. The South Sea Islander oils himself for protection against getting that chilly feeling from which even the folks in sunshineland are not exempt. Even in Baltimore you can use coconut oil on your hair and your body to the physical advantage of both.

Camp

FRESH milk in the backwoods.

Request:—"How can I keep milk during a two-week camping trip? I have heard that limewater is good. How does one use it?"

—GEORGE REMINGTON, Astoria, Long Island

Reply, by Major Chas. G. Percival:—"If you want good fresh milk buy the Klim milk powder made by Merrill-Soule of Syracuse; add water and you have sweet fresh milk. Properly chill and use. Limewater will not help; it is simply added to babies' milk to prevent souring in the stomach and gastric disturbances.

Insects

NONE is venomous (only spiders and scorpions are poisonous) but many are notorious carriers of disease.

Request:—"What disease-carrying, poisonous spiders and insects are found in Brazil and Equador?"

—R. J. BAER, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Dr. S. W. Frost:—"I can only enumerate some of the disease-carrying and poisonous spiders and insects. The poisonous offenders are confined to the spiders and scorpions. Many insects and arthropods are responsible for carrying diseases.

Numerous tropical bedbugs are transmitters of various diseases. The cone nosed bug (*Conorhinus megestus*) of Brazil, carries trypanosomiasis of man. Mosquitos transmit malaria, yellow fever and filarial diseases. The Phlebotomus flies transmit the European papappatic fever. The house fly, the world over, is a simple carrier of disease. Lice transmit a spirochaeta disease known as lasing fever, also typhus fever of which the causative organism is still unknown. There are other diseases with which I am not familiar that one has to contend with in Brazil and Equador.

Canada

OUTBOARDING on the Albany and Abitibi Rivers.

Request:—"In making a canoe trip to James Bay would outboard motorboats be advantageous traveling the Albany or Abitibi?"

—G. L. LEMON, Toronto, Canada

Reply, by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—"In a trip to James Bay via the Albany a large freight canoe

with square stern could be advantageously employed, using one of the lighter models of outboard engines. The only difficulty is to carry the necessary supplies of gasoline. Supplies for return can be purchased at James Bay, but at four times the cost in Toronto. The Abitibi trip could also make use of an outboard.

Running Amok

IF YOU see a frenzied native slashing his way madly through an Oriental bazaar, he has doubtless been smoking the "Leaf of Delusion," the "Cementer of Friendship"—*gunjah*.

Request:—"I would like to know the name of the intoxicant made from Indian hemp."

—JOSEPH KASSOVER, Brooklyn, New York

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturlec:—"Old Engl.: *Hanep*. German: *Hanf*. Latin: *Cannabis sativa*. Medicinal: *Cannabis indica*. Indian: *Churrus*.

The drink the Indians (Orientals) prepare from *churrus* is called *bhang* in Hindustani. Mixed with tobacco for smoking purposes, *gunjah*; also sometimes called *hashish*, which in all probability is the word you are after, it being the one often wrongly used in English, as its real meaning is: "the flowering top of the female plant of *Cannabis sativa*, from which the resin has not yet been removed."

In Calcutta it is known as *majoon*; in Cairo as *mapouchari*; and in Arabic as *damaues*, or *damaues*.

Hindu synonyms express the alleged satisfaction, claimed to be due to the use or smoking of *hashish*, or correctly *gunjah*, in their flowery way as: "Increase of Pleasure" or "Leaf of Delusion" or "Cementer of Friendship", though the use of the drug frequently produces violent homicidal mania.

The writer has observed several cases in which men, frenzied with the drug, suddenly rushed into streets and bazaars and, with dagger or sword, slashed, stabbed and cut at any one they met—which in the Orient is known as "running amok."

Mounted Police

AMERICANS have wangled their way into the Force, but not often.

Request:—"1. Are there many Americans in the R. C. M. P? 2. What is the highest rank? The lowest?"

—FRED OPLINGER, Noxen, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. H. Patrick Lee:—"1. Undoubtedly there are men of American birth in the service, but the recruiting regulations require men to be unmarried *British subjects*. If others get in, it is by "wangling it," as we used to say in France.

2. The highest rank is that of commissioner, and the lowest that of constable. Other ranks are corporal, sergeant, staff-sergeant, sergeant-major, inspector, superintendent, assistant-commissioner.

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